

Provincial Tales

Provincial Tales

By
Gertrude H. Bone



LONDON
DUCKWORTH & CO.

1904

Preface and Apology

IT must have been observed by most people at some time in their lives that the average person, speaking an entirely derived and imparted language, and living out of reach of emotion or passion, never, from one end of a comfortable existence to the other, utters a single inspiring, moving, or natural phrase. If passion, therefore, or deep feeling finds out such a one, it discovers him without any speech in which to express his emotion. His habitual facile speech is felt to be inadequate, since it has never after all expressed any feeling of his own, but rather what is felt to be due to, or customarily called forth by, the occurrence which has taken place. If he become ex-

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pressive at all, therefore, under the urgency of passion, it is in a language or gesture very little to be distinguished from that found out for themselves by children or unsophisticated persons ; and so universally is this accepted as true, that a man apparently under the influence of deep feeling who should fail from this simplicity of language, would be immediately accused of want of depth in feeling or of playing a part.

On the other hand, the ignorant poor, having at their disposal the most meagre and halting speech for their habitual need, reverse this customary law. Inexpressive by nature and education they are forced, under the pressure of bewildering circumstances or strong passion, to find for themselves an expression as nearly as possible derived from their actual sensations, and thus they often (since poetry is written in the same manner) attain in the communication of their deepest feeling to a dignified and

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moving language to be sought for in vain among people of an easier speech. To gather such moments as when, breaking under the strength of feeling from their accustomed reticence, narrow and unenlightened natures become thus impassioned and expressive, has been the desire of the author of these tales. Perhaps the experiment may be found to be interesting.



MORNING ON THE OUTSKIRTS.

Ja. W. W. Pearson

July 5th 1920. at Byways.

"Suppose this wide sea-shore⁴ as waiting
for some passionate ⁴luminous⁴ moment.
Suppose that, even as ⁴we are walking
here, some tragedy should detach itself
from these dunes & come to ⁴meet us

isthmus Bone

steeps.

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Nos. I. and VIII. by the courtesy of the Editor of *Macmillan's Magazine*.

POVERTY

Provincial Tales

I

POVERTY

MY friend and I were walking along the seashore in front of a northern town at which we had both spent the summer.* He, who was a painter and rather a moody fellow, had been for a long time silent, and I, in silence also, was observing the unusual and sinister appearance of the landscape. It was a strange evening. The sun, not yet set, was a dull orange colour, and with one single, vertical, upward ray disappearing into a cloud above, seemed to hang suspended in the mist like a huge pendulum swinging over the edge of the world. The sea beneath it had that curious unliquid

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appearance which sometimes falls upon it with night, while across it and the sand a mist was slowly dragging itself, and with us, as we walked, there sped the long, melancholy, complaining sound of a wind that carries rain.

"What a strange night," I said aloud.

"Yes," answered my companion, raising his head and coming to a halt. "It is on such a night, in such a scene, that I find the answer to those well-meaning people who would convince me that a landscape is incomplete without a human figure. Confess now, you who maintain that there is no great art which has not its birth in great emotion, what is there wanting in this solitary shore, under this darkening sky, to which a human figure could add anything of passion? Even the sinister touch which your modern artist demands is here."

"I agree with you," I returned, "that there is in this desolate landscape a deep and lasting emotion, but it seems to me as though one should go a step further. Suppose this wide seashore as waiting for some passionate human moment. Suppose that, even as we

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are walking here, some tragedy should detach itself from those dunes and come to meet us."

"I see what you mean," he replied after a pause; "but in that case I should give up painting. Such emotion is not paintable, or at any rate it has no place in landscape painting. Your human climax would unnerve me absolutely."

"For instance?" I asked.

"Ah, that is difficult," he answered; "but I will try, if only to convince you. Shall we walk on?"

We resumed our walk, and after a moment's thought he began.

"Well, explain it as you will, but your suggestion, and perhaps also something in this place under its unusual aspect, has recalled to my thoughts an incident which I witnessed years ago on just such a shore as this, an incident which I had almost forgotten, but which recurs to me now with great vividness, till I seem to remember every word and gesture of the unhappy woman whom I then discovered. It happened, as I said, some years ago, so that I was younger than I am now.

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I had gone to a small seaside town to paint. The town itself was a fair-weather place, full of invalids and fine ladies, but several miles along the shore there was a hamlet, or rather a jumble of huts built under the sandhills on a part of the shore from which the water had receded, and which, covered by a green moss, became even then at high tide little more than a morass, quaking and difficult to cross. This colony was inhabited by the shrimp-fishers who abound on those sandy levels and had a bad name for squalor and rioting.

“One day I set out to walk to this place along a raised high-road built out on the sand between the sea and the town. It was a fine day. The sun had blazed down from earliest morning, and by midday there was not a cloud in the sky. Miles of bleached sand which the tide had not covered for weeks were around me, and the road raised above it—upon which I was the solitary traveller—with its end disappearing, as it seemed, into that wilderness, appeared to me like a great visible parable or irony of life. There was no wind, and the sea had ebbed far away out of hearing, and except

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for one long flickering line on the horizon, out of sight. Looking back at the point where the road makes an abrupt turn to the left towards the land again, I saw the promontory upon which the town was built, rising, or so it appeared from that distance and place, sheer from the sea, a white curved arm encircling the shore. Leaving the road now empty behind me, I was at once at the entrance to the uninhabited country of sand, such a place as the one through which we are now walking—on one side rough dunes bound together by grey wisps of deep-rooted grass and untrodden mosses, and on the other a low sloping plain, with its gulls and sea-fowl, its passing sounds, its vague unlocated mourning and lament—a silent waste where few people go, and where strange things might very well happen even in daylight.

“For an hour I walked through this desert without seeing any living being, and hearing only my own footsteps in the sand. Then on looking back I could no longer see the town, and in front of me the sandhills had changed in shape, becoming lower and lower until at

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last they had the appearance of one large field lapsed without purpose into the sand. From this point I could see the long green spit which the land had thrust out towards the sea, and above it the houses of the fisher-folk, tumbling hovels jostled together without any attempt at a street among them, the whole settlement haphazard and desolate and at this hour almost empty.

“As I wandered among these huts, from which came the sharp, pungent scent of tar, of tackle and salt-fish, all at once I came upon a ragged house of the kind to be met with in a moorland country, long and low and roofed with slabs of stone which had gathered a greepish tinge from mould and exposure. Beside it, and joined to one end, was the black, unroofed skeleton of an old windmill. How far inland had this mill once stood before the sea, sucking away the land, had advanced to its edge, then retreating, left it useless to sea or land? It stood quite solitary, holding aloof from the crowded, impudent huts below, like a baited creature sullenly giving no sign to its tormentors.

“It seemed a ruin so desolate that the thought

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of any person living there did not occur to me; but following the track which led to the landward side of the mill, I came upon a woman standing with a child in her arms. Stunted and bent with work rather than with age, for her shoulders were bowed, her hands seamed, and her arms long and powerful, with one hand she stroked the head of the child who lay on her neck without moving, uttering a faint whining sound like a sick animal; and, indeed, on coming nearer I saw that it was very ill of some wasting disease. I saw also that the woman's face was sunken, her mouth drawn in, her eyes dull in the midst of two dark hollows. She was the living spirit of Poverty animating that wretched place. To explain my appearance I asked some question about the mill, which she answered briefly, and then, looking at the child, I said: 'The baby is very ill.'

" 'Yes, sir,' she said.

" 'Is she your only one?' I asked.

" 'No, sir,' she replied; 'I'm the mother of eleven. You wouldn't think it to look at me, but I am. All of them buried but this one.

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I had four little boys among them; they seemed strong, but they died.'

"'Eleven is a great number,' I said, at a loss for words; 'did you lose them young?'

"'Before they was of an age to take notice. Yes, I've had eleven little children. It seems a good many for such as me, but the Lord was very good to me, as He is to poor people, and He took them all from me. Yes, sir,' she continued, seizing desperately at the sympathy of a stranger as a lonely person will, 'I grieved at the time very hard, especially when I lost all the little boys: I couldn't part with them easy. But the Lord knowed best. I daresay He thought of the struggle I should have to keep them all. I should have had to work harder than what I have done to keep eleven children. And then the thought comes to my mind that they're all there waiting for me.'

"'That is a comfort to you,' I said.

"'Oh yes, sir, a comfort. But it grieves me most that I can't read. I can't fly to God's Word in trouble. The Lord knows it, and no doubt He'll forgive me. There was a lady tried to learn me—in her own home, she did, she

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took me into her own home—but what with having had to work, and being of a good age, I couldn't take it. She gave me the Book, too; but there, I can't read it, nor never shall.'

"Perplexed and embarrassed, I did not know what to say, but the woman, pushing open a door behind her, continued: 'My father's in the house. Will you come in and see him?' She went through the doorway, and I followed her into a kitchen which was dim and close and dry as an oven, in the darkest corner of which a very old and very decrepit man was sitting, his head fallen on his breast and his hands clasped in front of him. The woman went up to him, and grasping his shoulder, shouted, "Father, father, here's a gentleman come to see you.'

"The old man raised his head, and sighing at every movement, peered round the room in search of me. As I stepped forward that he might see me, he said, shaking his head, 'I'm an ould man, sir.'

"'I'm afraid you're not very well,' I replied, taking his hand.

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“‘I’m an ould man,’ he repeated; ‘that’s what it is; I’m an ould man.’

“‘He’s eighty-nine, is father,’ said the woman; ‘aren’t you, father?’ she asked, bending down.

“‘Eh?’ said the old man, looking up sideways.

“‘You’re eighty-nine—eighty-nine years of age.’

“‘Yes,’ he said, ‘eighty-nine; the age of my father before me.’

“‘That’s a long life,’ said I; ‘you remember strange things, I daresay.’

“‘Yes, sir,’ he said, stirring a little and gasping at the same time; ‘do you know a place called Home’s Wood?’

“‘No,’ said I.

“‘Home’s Wood,’ he repeated, looking at me doubtfully. ‘No? It was theer I come from—from Home’s Wood. There was a journeyman tailor lived theer in them days, very like you to look at. You don’t know it.’

“‘No, I never heard of it,’ I said again, upon which he seemed to consider.

“‘I had two donkeys in them days,’ he said

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after a pause, raising his head and chuckling ;
'that was before I come here.'

" 'Tell us their names, father,' said the woman.

" 'Names? There was one of 'em Lady and the other was Lion,' he replied.

" 'He wur a pedlar once, wur father,' explained the woman, 'before he wur laid aside. It's rheumatic gout as ails him. I laughed at the doctor when he told me. "Oh yes," he said, "it's all right; poor people can have gout as well as the quality." "It seems then," I says, "that there's complaints can be had free by poor people, if there's nothing else"; and he laugh'd and says, "Yes, it does seem so."'

" Here the old man stirred again and looked at his daughter. 'She's seen sorrow,' he said. I nodded. 'Yes,' he said, 'she's seen sorrow.'

" After this he became silent, and with his head bowed, seemed to have withdrawn from us into himself, into his memories, perhaps, or that empty dreaming-place which his memory had become.

" The woman, talking still, went to the

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window-sill and took from it one of those cheap Bibles which are used to distribute among the poor.

“‘This is what the lady give me,’ she said, holding it out to me. But as I took it, a movement from the child in her arms made her look at its face. I could see that it was already dying. The woman held it for a moment, and then, laying it on a wide chair covered with a cushion, she went and seated herself on the floor several paces away and covered her face with both hands. ‘I cannot abide it!’ she cried. ‘Oh, I cannot abide it!’

“The old man remained motionless, and though I saw that there was nothing to be done, I could not go away. Then I thought of going to summon assistance, and moved towards the window to lay down upon the sill the Bible which I was still holding; but suddenly the woman, springing up, snatched the Book from my hands. She opened it once, and stared at the pages as though knowledge would come for the looking; then, before I could speak again, with a gesture which I have never forgotten, she raised the child’s head and

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laid the Bible underneath it. Almost at the instant the child trembled and lay still, its head resting on God's Word. I could do nothing. I went out and found a woman, to whom I gave some money, and sent her into the house; and then I set out over the sands, which were nearly dark, towards home.

"You see," said my friend after a pause, "I know the kind of emotion you mean. I suppose, too, that representations of the Poor and their sorrows have their place in painting, or how explain Millet? But as for the emotion I have just described to you—well, don't ask *me* to paint it, that's all!"

THE RIGHT EYE

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AS William Mabbott on the prow of the canal-boat the *Princess Mary* was in the act of throwing a stone at his lean horse straining on the slippery tow-path, a small terrier suddenly sprang into sight, barking shrilly. Distracted by this, he threw the stone at the dog instead of at his patient horse, and as he did so he became aware of a man seated on the path, whom, until that moment, he had taken for a part of the lock-gate. This man, who appeared to be of middle age and very broad and squat in figure, was seated on the frozen stone edge of the canal staring at the water, his knees drawn up to his chin, and his hands clasped round them. He was dressed in a dingy brown coat and brown corduroys tied round the middle of each leg after the manner of carters, and as he

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sat there all of a heap he seemed like a huge toad which had climbed up before the winter had fairly begun, to look about him. He might be bargeman, collier, or carter, but he remained as immovable as the lock-gate which the barge was approaching.

Mabbott, seeing the gate shut before him, stood upright on the prow and shouted, "Hullo there!" The man gave not the slightest sign of hearing. The little terrier ceased barking at the barge and stopped beside him, making an eager whining sound through her nose. Mabbott shouted again, making each word louder than the preceding one. "Hullo! I say! Are you asleep—or deaf—or dead? Help me to open that gate there!" The man sat motionless as before. Upon this, Mabbott, becoming irritated, had recourse to his customary method of attack from on board, and threw a stone where it fell with a splash in front of the strange man. This had the desired effect. While the terrier sprang backwards and forwards barking at the splash, the man raised his head, and looking at the bargee said very deliberately—

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"Do you want to be showed the way into the canal?"

"No, I don't," said Mabbott.

"Then you're going the road to have it showed you," returned the other with the same deliberation.

"No offence!" said Mabbott, "but why don't you speak when you're spoken to?"

The man made no reply, and Mabbott, who had left his boy at the last gate, saw that nothing could be gained from him. Steering the barge, which floated low in the water with a heavy load of gravel, alongside, he sprang on to the tow-path, a tall and muscular figure, with the bargeman's broad-brimmed hat and great boots reaching above his knees. He walked like a man stiff from cold, jerking himself forward from the shoulder as he strode towards the bar of the gate. The other man did not even look at him.

It was the season just before winter, when an early and light snowfall was beginning to sink into the ground. In the distance the plain still appeared vast and ghostly, but near the canal the ridges of the furrows could be

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seen, making an uncertain pattern of black lines upon that white counterpane spread over everything. The trees, freed from their burden of snow, looked infinitely small in the midst of the wide silenced country—an unfamiliar country, without paths, conveying to the eye a sense of illimitable distance and infinite barrenness, and capable of radiating a weird light from itself, since none came from the dead sky, covered by heavy troops of snow-clouds waiting their time. The wind, finding no familiar echo in that plain laid waste of sound, was motionless. On the right lay the town, barricaded with thick fog. From the open country it appeared like a vast army arrayed for defence against some evil that might come up like a dragon out of the plain. As far as one could see nothing was moving in the frozen waste save the living figures on the edge of the canal, itself a grey, listless river, with the barge lying heavily and quietly upon it.

Mabbott, digging his heels into the ground and pushing with his back against the handle of the gate, found it stiff and grating from the frost, and not being able to move it, he swore

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under his breath at the man who sat without stirring a finger to help him. "He's too big for his jacket *he* is," he said half aloud. "I should think he's a juke at least, when he's at 'ome." The man did not appear to have heard. The little dog, who had followed Mabbott on to the gate, had pushed her delicate head through the railing and was peering inquisitively at the water, whining and sniffing the cold. Mabbott, tugging at his handle, lost patience.

"I'd sit inside altogether if I was you, seeing it's such a beautiful summer's day. It'll be cooling," he remarked to the irritating man.

"Oh, you would, would you?" retorted the other, springing suddenly to his feet and advancing. "Now then, have you got anything on your mind?"

"Nothing as I'm going to put off it," replied Mabbott, taking three strides across the gate to the other side of the canal.

"He's frightened," jeered the stranger.

"Who of?" asked Mabbott defiantly, coming half-way back across the gate.

"Black Sam," replied the other unexpectedly.

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"My word, Sam," said Mabbott uneasily, "if I'd 'ave recognised you I'd 'ave held my noise."

"Come back over 'ere and I'll not hurt you," said Sam.

Mabbott looked at the *Princess Mary* close to the other side of the canal. Black Sam saw the look.

"You'll be bound to come, you see," he said, "and besides, as there's a living God in heaven, I'll not touch you. My brother, I'm a changed man."

"I daresay," returned Mabbott gloomily.

"It's as true as the May," said Black Sam, "and if you don't believe it I'll ax you a question. 'Ave you ever heard tell that Black Sam put up with plaguin' from anybody?"

"No," answered Mabbott shortly.

"No more 'aven't I," said Sam grimly, "but you've seen it this day, let alone hearing tell of it. If you'd 'ave spoke to me two months and a fortnit since same as you've done to-day I shouldn't 'ave cared if you'd lost your life. But if you come over 'ere and 'ave a word with me (I'm a littler man till you), I'll open this

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gate to the bargain, and if you don't come, why, I'll make you."

Mabbott came across the gate like a person mesmerised.

In that dingy country where the edges of a large town are ravelled out—which is not, in fact, country at all, but possessing as it does shabby fields and black cinder lanes, has neither the solitude of the country nor the protection of lighted streets—there lives a race of men, semi-brutes, who, turning from all natural and kindly affection for their fellows, attach themselves with passionate devotion to the dumb creatures, who live in their life, and who die when their time comes "like a dog," as the saying is. Shunned and feared by quiet people as a menace and danger, these men acquire the habits of wild animals. Suspicious and revengeful of each other, they yet dislike to be alone, so that they work and fight in gangs. Often repulsive or grotesque in appearance, they eat and drink with the unbridled appetite of beasts, but among themselves they are highly sociable, and have their own ideas of manhood and the tender emotions. A gang

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of such men will create for themselves a leader from one who excels the rest in strength or ferocity, and whom they obey in all matters without question.

Black Sam was such a leader. He had worked in the mines from the day he was six years old. As a child he had been taken out of bed and carried to the coal-pit asleep by his mother. Later, he had been beaten thither by his father. He had been nicknamed "Black Sam" first of all because of his swarthy skin and the early growth of black hair on his face. Added to this there was the coal-dust which he seldom washed off, and his reputation as a fighter. This was so great, that his friends boasted Sam to have had a fight a day for the last twenty years. He was a small man, but deep-chested, with a neck like a bull's and a head like a battering-ram. In his morose and sullen strength he resembled nothing so much as a young bull that has been kept for a long time in the stable, as well as in his steadily resentful stare, his manner of facing round with his whole body if suddenly addressed, and the impression which his entire attitude conveyed

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of relentless and aggressive ferocity hardly held in check. His fist, when he spoke to anyone, was always clenched. "He'd as soon knock you down as look at you," said the people of the district. His reputation was enormous, almost superstitious, and was increased by the fact that though he could drink twice as much liquor as an ordinary drunkard, it seldom had any visible effect on him. So that his terrible strength seemed always deliberately and consciously put forth. He had a wife who drank heavily, and who, when in liquor, was as furious as Sam was morose. Sometimes he beat her, and would have done so oftener, but she made too much noise and attracted the police to the house. Of the five children they had had only one remained alive, an idiot, whose sole wit lay in keeping out of the way of his parents. He loitered about the street corners, frightening the children, and peering into the mill-cottages in the expectancy of scraps of food which charitable women would throw out to him, and which he bolted, never satisfied, like an animal.

Besides these, Black Sam kept dogs for

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coursing and a bulldog called "The Devil," with a fame as widespread and merited as Sam himself. This dog was a source of fear to his wife, and it was therefore Sam's chief discipline to her. He took a grim delight in finding her overcome with drink on the filthy floor of their home and in setting The Devil at her head. When she awoke and found this terrible dog beside her she would be obliged to lie without moving, and quaking with fear until Sam, tired of his amusement or requiring the brute, called him away from his post. When good women of the neighbourhood tried to break Sam's wife from her drinking habits, she would exclaim with maudlin tears that the dog drove her to it, but since she had been known as a hard drinker before the dog's existence, it was not easy to believe this, and so much more appalling does this habit appear in a woman than in a man, that Sam's wife was looked upon with disgust by all. As for Sam, it was well known that no terror could harass him, and when it became known that the dogs occupied the one bed in that hovel and that the wife and idiot son slept on the floor, it was

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repeated with perverse pride in the district as but another characteristic of the worst man in the country.

So William Mabbott, as he came across the gate in unwilling obedience, was afraid of the fighter whom he had unwittingly provoked. Sam, however, held out his hand for the other to shake, and then with two shoves of his shoulder sent the gate swinging against the side of the lock. This feat he regarded with a smile, and turning to Mabbott he said amicably—

“We’ll sit down here aside of the canal.”

“I’m blowed if I will,” said Mabbott; “if you’ve a mind to say anything you can come aboard,” and he strode in front of Sam like a man expecting to be hit from behind. Black Sam followed him and sat down on the deck. Mabbott leaned against the rudder and waited, not moving his eyes from the other’s face. There seemed to be something the matter with his companion. He appeared uneasy, like a wild creature that has been wounded and crept away from its companions, and, half in terror; half in amazement at its unwonted sensations

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and failing strength, allows itself to be approached and ministered to by strange hands. After a short silence, during which Mabbott's stupid and rather coarse face grew more and more perplexed in its expression, Sam began suddenly—

“If a man that might be a stranger in these parts had come to you this morning and said, ‘I’ve heerd tell of a man they call Black Sam, and I’d like to know a little more about ‘im,’ what would you ‘ave said?”

“Said?” echoed Mabbott, tilting his hat backward in his embarrassment, “said? Why, I’d ‘ave said, ‘Black Sam? He’s rough is Black Sam, very rough indeed.’”

“Yes,” replied Sam with satisfaction, “and that’s what I’ve always ‘ad the name of being, but you see it’s got to be contradicted, that there, because, my brother, I’m a changed man.”

“You don’t look any different, Sam,” said Mabbott.

“Looks is nothing at all to go by,” retorted Sam. “It’s what’s inside of you that matters in this world. Yes! I can’t find any doubts

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in it. I looks at it on the one side and then I turns it over and I looks at it on the other, and whichever side's up there's a change."

"Well, what 'ave I got to do with it?" asked Mabbott.

"It's this 'ere way," said Sam, "it's hard to come out of your character among them that's accustomed to you, very 'ard. Having begun rough, they'd have you go on rough, and as I'm telling you, there's a change. So when I seed a man as I didn't know very perticular coming down the canal, I sez to myself, 'I'll 'ave a bit of talk with this 'ere man on account of this little matter as is on my mind.' That theer man being you, that's wot you've got to do with it. For the Lord's sake dunnot go away and leave me now as I've made your acquaintance. If you knew the plaguing I've had, you'd be sorry to know my feelings at this very minit."

"Wot do you mean, Sam," asked Mabbott dubiously, "that you've become a good liver?"

"That's what I mean," replied Sam, "and it comes very unnatural to a man of my nature. You see, I've always been a man that acted

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plain. Wot's in my heart, d'ye see, shows in my face, and if a man started any impudence with me it was a bad job but wot he'd be on his back in two seconds. But now, you see, when they know as I can't hit back, they're round me buzzing like midges. The little uns is worst. There was one bit of a lad shouts across to another, 'Eh, Jim, come and look at Black Sam, he's getten washed!' But he said no more till he said, 'Forgive me, Sam.' 'Yes,' I sez, 'I forgives you, but it was you that was to blame.'"

"Well, *I* can't stop 'em plaguin', Sam," interrupted Mabbott.

"You wasn't axed to," returned Sam, "but this is 'ow it is. It's bad enough to 'ave all the men you was once friends with turn against you and pass you by in the street because you're a good liver, but that's nothink, nothink at all. Do you see that little terrier? It's come to my mind that I've got to make away with her."

"I'll buy 'er off you," said Mabbott.

"You won't," said Sam grimly. "I'll sell 'er to nobody. This is just wheer I am to-day.

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I've always been a man, as perhaps you've heerd tell, that's been very ill-mannered, and when I first took to good living, which is two months and a fortnit since, I sez to myself, 'I shall 'ave to give up drinking and betting.' I made up my mind from the beginning to do that, but I sez to myself, 'I'll keep the dogs,' I sez, 'I'm used to 'em, and they're used to me, and it's same as I've heerd, if you live in a stable you needn't be a horse, and if you keep dogs you needn't run 'em.' But you can't change so ready when you're going of forty years of age. When I come home to my little cabin down yonder, same as you might see it many a time, the dogs was wild to be out. So I'd on with my cap and be half-way to the coursing-ground before I knowed wheer I was. So I made a bargain. I sez to the Lord, 'I'll sell 'em; I mean it; I do indeed!' and mind you, I *did* mean it too. I made a beginning with The Devil, considering his name. I sold 'im to Billy Sampson, the man as keeps the 'Bird i' the Hand,' aside of the four-lane-ends. He come to me one night and he sez, 'Sam,' he says, 'will you lend me your bull-

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terrier for a night or two? There's two publics been broke into this last week,' he sez. 'Say no more,' I sez, 'I'll sell 'im you!' 'You will?' he sez. 'How's that?' 'It doesn't matter 'ow it is,' I sez. 'I'm going to part with 'im; will you buy him?' 'And welcome,' he sez. 'And if you was to know of anyone as wants the others you can let 'im know that I can oblige 'im,' I sez. 'Yes I will,' he sez; and that night I was washing me when I got 'ome from the pit when there come a knock at the back door. So I got the towel and dried me, and when I opened the door who should be there but Joe Blight and Ted Jones.

"'Evenin' Sam,' sez Joe. 'Evenin',' I sez.

'Is this 'ere true wot I've heerd that you're a changed man, and you're going to part with the dogs?'

"'Yes, it is,' I sez.

"'I'm very sorry to hear it,' he sez, 'but I'll have a look at the dogs.' I sold 'im two that night, and Ted Jones got two as well, so then I'd only this little wench left. 'I'll keep 'er for company,' I sez, 'it isn't same as if she was a running dog'; but I might as well

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'ave kept the lot as her. What with 'er pretty ways and 'er being such a knowing little wench I was going wild to be after the dogs again. So one night I made up my mind. I went into the back kitchen and I sez to the Lord, 'Oh, Lord, I'm not a learnt man, and if my prayers is prayed crooked You must straighten 'em, for I mean 'em straight. When I told You that I'd be a good liver for the rest of my life I meant it; I did indeed; but I never thought it would come to sellin' the dogs. But I'm not going back on my word wot I've promised if You'll 'elp me over it. I've sold the other dogs as Thou knowest, and if I stand to my word I shall 'ave to get rid of this little wench; but oh, Lord, forgive me, I can't abide that anyone else should 'ave 'er—I've reared 'er from a pup—so with Thy help I'm going to drown her.' That's wot I said, and, mind you, I meant it, but I've come here every day for a week, and I can't do it. Every morning I say to myself, 'I've passed my word, and I'll do it for certain to-day,' and every night I go 'ome and say, 'I'll do it to-morrow, sure'; but I can't go through with

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it. Look here! I've hit women and little children, but, bad as I've been, I never hit a dog in all my life."

Sam's face flushed purple as he finished, and great tears began to roll down his cheeks.

"There's something queer about it, Sam," said Mabbott, who had listened to Sam's recital with an interest which absorbed all his fear. "I don't think I hold with it. You'd far better sell 'er to me."

"Say another word about selling and you'll be sorry," returned Sam with a renewal of vigour; "if I've got to part with 'er she shall go the way I've choosed and no other."

"Whatever made you go and tell Him you'd get rid of 'er for?" asked Mabbott in growing perplexity.

"It comes of living ill-mannered for over forty years," said Sam. "By that time, look 'ere, it's *in you*. I'm thinkin' of this personally a little. I'm not a learnt man; I couldn't read my own name if it wur writ in letters as big as that boat, but I know this 'ere, I've either got to send that dog to heaven now, or go to the other place myself a bit later."

THE RIGHT EYE

As the other opposed him, Black Sam's hesitation began to disappear. His eyes glowed again, and his voice became louder. Mabbott, unconscious of this, was absorbed in his pleading. "She'll be better off here than in heaven, Sam, with her being an outdoor dog. I suppose you couldn't bring your mind to take back what you've said?"

"I've passed my word," said Sam. "It's been said 'Black Sam's a warm character, but whatever Black Sam says he sticks by.'"

"Well, I won't stand by and see it done," returned Mabbott. "There's something wrong somewhere about it, and I'll not 'ave it on *my* hands." He began to grow more and more vehement. "You *dursn't* do it, Sam, I sure you *dursn't* when it come to it."

"There's no one ever said '*dursn't*' to *me* before," said Sam, getting up on to his feet. Mabbott stood still from fright, but Sam paid no heed to him. He called to the dog, who had been poking her dainty nose into every corner of the barge. She came at once and looked inquiringly at him, one forepaw raised from the ground.

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"Have you got a piece of rope?" asked Mabbott, relenting at the sight of the impotent sorrow in Sam's face. He nodded.

"I'll see you through with it, Sam," said Mabbott, leaping on to the bank and wandering up and down in search of a heavy stone. He found one and brought it back. Black Sam was sitting on the deck again. The terrier had climbed on to his knee and was excitedly licking his face.

"I shall never do it," said Sam, with a shaking mouth. Mabbott stood helplessly.

"I can't stop much longer," he said.

"'Ere, well, give me that stone," said Sam savagely. He made it fast to the rope, and tied it to the dog's collar. She dragged her head aside angrily, annoyed by the rough rope on her neck. Sam took her up, holding the stone to ease the weight, and stepped from the boat. He stood for a second with the dog in his arms.

"Sam!" shouted Mabbott.

"Stand back!" yelled Sam as, with a sudden heave, he threw the dog into the canal. As her body touched the water he uttered a

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loud cry, half a sob, half a cry of anger, and clapping both hands over his ears, he turned and ran with all his might farther and farther away from the canal. Mabbott, lashing his horse, leapt on board the *Princess Mary*, and threw stone after stone at the poor drawer like a madman, as if he sought to escape the vengeance hovering about the scene.

THE MOTHER

III

THE MOTHER

ANN BUTTERWORTH was the ill-used wife of a drunken farmer, who rented a thin strip of ground from a wealthy yeoman, the owner of half the surrounding country. Both this man and his wife, a childless and prosperous couple, had the reputation of being good managers. "You may depend upon it, John Elliott wasn't born yesterday, nor Martha either," said the people of the neighbourhood. They showed their worldly wisdom and their sense of justice by retaining on their farms only men with good characters, so that they had had an eye on Michael Butterworth for some time. He, in his turn, was a weak-kneed bully, crafty and boastful, who forced his wife to work beyond her strength that he might have money to cut a figure at the ale-house, and who spent such time as he was

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neither drunk nor asleep in poaching on the lands of his more industrious neighbours. Up to this date he had, by the incessant labour of his wife, succeeded in paying the rent, but it was certain that the first time he showed signs of wavering the house and the land would be given to some more capable farmer.

Of Ann Butterworth's past history nothing was known in the district. She had come from a distant part of the country, and it was believed generally that Martha Elliott had formerly known her, which was the reason, everyone conjectured, why she had ever been allowed to live on her farm. She was a young woman who had gone grey early, slatternly and dirty in appearance. She was thin and hollow-cheeked of course, for she had married a drunkard, and what she had had of grace had long ago been exacted from her by the task-master with whom she lived. In spite of this, the women of the district thought her proud. "She carries her head high," they said. It was only when one came in contact with her that one saw what she really was, a timid and irresolute woman. She had never known

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happiness which gives women confidence. At the age of nineteen, ignorant and timid, she had allowed herself to be captivated by the crafty braggart who drained her life quickly away. Her face had a continually amazed expression, as if at the sorrow she had gone through. If you spoke to her you were astonished that she had heard and understood you, her spirit seemed so far away.

For the broken in spirit, work is the only refuge, and Ann Butterworth did the work of four women. She was a slattern, but not an idle one. She worked literally like a slave, labouring in the fields, dressed in faded, ragged garments of different colours. Later, people noticed that she went barefoot about the country. Yet in the midst of her shrivelled existence one passion remained alive (as you have seen in the face of a paralysed man eyes fearfully and wistfully living and alone able to move of the whole body), and that was her passion for the seven children who depended on her alone in the world for food and covering. They seemed to have little affection for her, for affection has to be learnt

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as well as any other virtue, and she did not know how to teach them. But if they had died she would long ago have been a beggar. From morning to night she worked with only one idea in her mind, to get enough food for her seven children and a place to cover them at night, and by her toil she had thus far kept the farm together. Every morning she might be seen crossing the pastures with her children, carrying one who was lame to the school-house. In the middle of the day she would return to the school, and uncovering a hole she had made in an unfrequented lane, she would place there such food as she had been able to get. She taught her children how to uncover the hole and find the food for themselves. If she had given it to them when they went in the morning, as other parents did, the half-starved children would have eaten it at once, and at midday have cried for more, which she never had. A charitable woman, discovering this hiding-place by chance, sometimes placed food there, from pity for the forlorn little creatures. Ann found this out, but she did not let her children know. Whenever it

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happened she let them think that their mother had brought them a better dinner than usual. Out of school the children ran wild about the country, learning nothing, and constantly being driven away by decent folk, like stray animals that had wandered by mistake into their farm-yards.

Then she had always her husband by her side. From morning to night she slaved upon the farm, but a woman's work and a bully's appetite are not equally matched, and week by week the stock became smaller, until at last nothing was left—and all this time the farm was running to waste. The farmers had begun to talk of it at the market. "Of course, you can't expect but what a woman'll take to dairy-work if it's left to her," they said, "but it's as nice a little tillage-farm as you'll meet in the country." Some even went the length of asking John Elliott the price of the farm as it stood, hoping to be able to buy it for an old song. The women, thinking of Ann Butterworth, said, "She faces it out very well"; but in reality Ann heard nothing of these rumours. In her indifference to everything round her, she

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had not realised that while one is very sorry for the unfortunate they cannot be suffered to stand in the way of progress. She had come to imagine that having lived so long unmolested she would never be disturbed, and that her days of slavery earned for her the right to possess the farm. She paid the utmost she had to give, but it was not the price required.

One afternoon at the end of a summer that had burnt up the fields and made the trees heavy with heat and ripeness, Ann, looking out of the window of her untidy kitchen, saw two women, gossips of the neighbourhood, running up the field towards the house. Out of doors it was almost too hot to move, and as they had thought of sitting down to rest in the shelter of the hedge, suddenly, without the least warning, there had fallen upon them the ominous, heavily lingering drops of a thunder shower. The sound of the rain in that stifled country was like a breeze blowing among withered leaves. The fields were filled with the noise of the hissing rain and the rushing of innumerable channels. The whole landscape

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had in an instant become grey behind that dropping bead-curtain which swayed backwards and forwards against the crossing gusts of wind, while the rain ran from the thatch of the roof in long, vibrating silver threads like bowstrings incessantly twanging.

The gossips, two little fat women, ran in without ceremony, and seating themselves upon the high settle, panting and groaning, they complained loudly of this sudden shower. "And it's no sooner on than it's off!" exclaimed the younger of the two, a little puckered woman whose face twitched continually, and whose head nodded with palsy, as if in confirmation of all she said. The shower had, in fact, stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and almost at the moment the two gossips entered the kitchen, as though it had been merely for the purpose of playing them a trick. They had been talking as they came near the house of its inmates, and especially of Ann Butterworth, whom they regarded as a hardly used but proud woman. Now they both sat awkwardly silent, consumed with curiosity to know whether what they had been discussing

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was true, but neither finding any way to ask a question. After a few moments, since the rain was over and they could think of nothing to say, they slipped off the settle and prepared to go, and as they did so the little puckered woman, making up her mind suddenly, said—

“Well, good afternoon, Mrs. Butterworth. I suppose we shan’t be having you for neighbours long now?”

“I don’t know anything different,” replied Ann in her dazed way.

“Don’t you?” said the other, lingering in the doorway. “Well, I’m sure I’m glad to hear it. I was just saying to Eliza before we came in, ‘It’s a shame if it is so,’ I says. ‘I don’t know a harder-working woman than Ann Butterworth, and I’m sure her children’s always as tidy as they can be, taking all things into account.’”

“Certainly,” responded the stouter one, “I’ve always said, and you can bear witness of it, Jane, ‘I’m sorry for Ann Butterworth,’ I says, ‘I am indeed! A hard-working, decent woman,’ I says, ‘with seven children.’ And as for removing, Mrs. Butterworth,” she went

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on with more excitement, "I'm sure if I had it to do over again I should go out of my mind. I remember when my master brought me to the farm we lived on before this one (though it's twelve years ago, and I've been a widow six), one day he come in, and I'd just put the bread in sponge as it might be at that fireside there and me sitting here, and he says to me all of a sudden, 'There's a gentleman wants to buy the farm,' he says, 'and he wants to work it himself,' he says, 'so we must look out for another.' 'What, *our* farm?' I says. 'Yes, ours,' he says, and I just sat me right back in my chair and 'Eh, *dear* me!' I says, 'this is a life of shifting!' I just give him those words, 'Eh, *dear* me!' I says, 'this is a life of shifting.'"

"Yes, but he's hard is John Elliott," interrupted the other, "and Martha's hard as well. Whatever do you think I heard her call Mrs. Butterworth? I heard her with my own ears call her a thriftless woman, and I was talking to their Phœbe the other day. 'Oh, Jane!' she says just like this, 'Martha Elliott's a nigger to drive!' I couldn't help smiling at her. 'You don't have to walk when you go

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there,' she says ; 'you have to run. Oh, she's a nigger to be sure,' she says."

"Well I never!" said the other ; "but it's them that has to do with them that knows. Good afternoon again, Mrs. Butterworth!" and the two gossips set off laboriously down the shining and slippery field-path, clutching at their skirts and jerking, one to the right and the other to the left, as they waddled slowly away.

Left alone, Ann Butterworth sat idle until evening came. She did not doubt that the calamity of which the woman spoke was coming upon her, for all her life, the worst that could happen to her had happened. But she had reached the end of her resources, and as she sat thinking over the tale of the gossips, she forgot the farm and her husband, forgot even her children, and there began to grow up within her a feeling of anger against Martha Elliott, who had known her all her life, and had now called her a thriftless woman. Over and over again she repeated to herself, "A thriftless woman! a thriftless woman!" She began to long to see Martha once more and confront her with her words. She waited until

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it was dusk, and then went to the door to watch for the children. Soon she saw them coming up the field—seven children, all thin and ragged and quiet, as drunkards' children are. When she saw them she went down to the gate of the field to meet them.

"You must all go into the house and stop there till I come back," she said.

"Give me something to eat," said the biggest.

"I'll perhaps bring something back with me," said Ann, "but you must go into the house as I tell you"; then, leaving them looking after her, she set off in the direction of Elliott's farm, a long, low building on the crown of a distant ridge, in the midst of pasture-fields.

The country around her was all silent. The labourers had gone home from their work in the fields, and the cows were back in the pastures. Only the birds still kept up a faint twittering. Presently they ceased, and the quiet light of an autumn evening shone under the branches of the trees. The corn-stacks were standing in rows in the harvest-fields,

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with long shadows beside them. No sound came from the parched and silent country. It was the day's breathing-time and all creatures were tranquil, awaiting rest and the cool sleep of the night—all but Ann Butterworth, who in a short time would have no place to shelter seven little children who were hungry. As she went, walking quickly in the dusty lanes, she met no one. She had never been along this road before, and as she came to each sign-post she stopped to read it. The road of the valley along which she went lay in a deep and quiet and wooded place, and at the end of it, as if through a telescope, appeared the sun, still lingering on the shoulder of the hill, the heart of a wonderful suffusion of light, fading unwillingly. The hill-top bending above that wooded and sunken valley was grassy and dark and so still that as Ann left the valley road and came to the path where one climbs the hill, she appeared the only living thing on that tranquil slope. As a river flowing through a distant landscape makes no sound, but only shines and moves; or as on a still summer's night a meadow in flood glimmers among the

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grey pastures, and though you look closely into the night you cannot see it more plainly, nor, looking away, can you lose sight of it, so she appeared, moving on the dark and bare hillside, until she reached the ridge where the land fell away into a wide plain, from which the mist was now coming up, blurring the shapes of the trees and making them appear like strange plants growing in the bed of that wonderful luminous ocean of vapour and light.

When she reached the top she raised her hand to shade her eyes and looked into the haze. Now she could see houses and churches in the plain, and far away, to the right of a clump of trees, was a long shining strip which might be water or the long roof of Elliott's farm. At the sight of this she stopped. She looked at her bare feet and ragged dress. She had started in anger to confront Martha Elliott who had known her all her life and who had called her a thriftless woman. She repeated it to herself, "A thriftless woman," and she found that she was no longer angry. All she wanted was to go home again and hide herself in the place to which she had grown

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accustomed. She turned to go back, but at the same moment she remembered her children whom Martha was about to cast homeless on the world. She returned and came slowly down the hill and did not look back again. Only, as she walked with that long house always within sight, she remembered that Martha was well-to-do and she said to herself, "I should never be known for the same." Almost before she was aware she had reached the house, a newly whitewashed farm, trim and prosperous. She passed the square flower-garden in front, and her feet grating on the gravel, she went round to the back door. A maid who was talking over the hedge to a manservant turned round quickly at the sound and came away from the hedge.

"There's nobody in," she said, seeing who was there. "It's market-day at Heaton, and they won't be back till late."

"I'll stop till they come back," said Ann; "I've walked a good way."

"I'm sure it'll be no use, Mrs. Butterworth," said the girl. "I'm very sorry for you, but when master says a thing he sticks to it."

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"I'll stop till she comes back," repeated Ann.

"Well, don't say I didn't tell you," said the girl, going back to the hedge while Ann sat on the doorstep leaning against the lintel. Presently the girl came back and tried to persuade her to go away, but receiving no answer, she put on her apron and went down the road to fetch water.

Ann sat on and on, and now it was rapidly growing darker and the tattered remains of the sunset had drifted across the sky. What was the broken woman thinking of? Were thoughts of the girlhood she had long forgotten visiting her again? Or was she crouching there without thought, absorbed in misery darker and more terrible because it was formless and surrounded her like a fearful and impenetrable shadow? The darkness became deeper. A watchman had come along the road below the farm and set a brazier of coals where the highway was being mended. It shook out its light over the hedges, the road, the walls of the farm; above, below, on every side, like a boy playing with a burning-glass.

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In the distant blue of the sky small points of light appeared one by one. Then above the darkened meadows there floated upwards the great harvest moon, rising sideways and giving light as she rose ; and at the same moment, as though the sound had come with the moon's rising, Ann heard the noise of wheels in the distance. The servant-girl ran quickly through the gate into the house. •

“Dear me, Mrs. Butterworth, aren't you gone yet?” she said, and disappeared within doors.

But Ann did not hear her. She was listening for that distant sound which came now distinctly, and again was carried by the wind which was rising and whining all round the building. She stood up as it became louder, and walked down to the gate of the farmyard. She watched the red lights of the trap coming nearer, lighting up the hedges as they passed, and making a shining patch upon the road which came closer and closer, until the lamp flashed into her face and dazzled her eyes so that she could see nothing else.

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"Open that gate there, can't you, Phœbe," she heard the farmer say. "Why, who's there? *Isn't* it Phœbe?"

"No, it's Ann Butterworth," said Ann.

"Now, Mrs. Butterworth," said the farmer after a moment's silence, "we've no time to attend to you now. You'd better get home again. We can't have you loitering about here."

"I'm not a thief, John Elliott," said Ann in a louder voice. "I came to see Martha. Is she there?"

"Yes, she's here," replied the farmer's wife from the darkness; "you must keep your tongue off my master, or I'll not hear a word you've got to say. Now what is it you want? They've been talking to you about your farm, I suppose."

"They say you're going to turn us off it. Is it true?" said Ann.

"You may just as well know it as not," answered Martha after a pause. "We can't have your Michael on it any longer. We could have let it twenty times over for the time you've been on it."

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"It's the first time I've been to see you since you was married, Martha. You're well-to-do, I can see. It's a fine farm you've got——"

"It's been worked for," interrupted the farmer.

"Oh, John Elliott," said Ann, coming nearer, "you're not a bad man, same as my Michael; but you're hard, you're very hard."

"Now, Ann," said the farmer's wife, cutting her short, "this is between you and me. Say what you've got to say, and be done with it."

"You're right," said Ann; "it's between you and me. I was born as good as you are, Martha, and to-night there's no one to stand between us and say 'you was both on the same footing once.' They say that marriage changes a woman, and that you've grown very hard, but you wasn't hard-hearted as a girl, Martha. Do you remember when your grandfather was going to put the bailiffs on Job Roddy, and you went to ask him not to? 'Nay, but it's a bad debt, little wench,' he says. 'Nay, grandad, wait a bit longer,' you

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says. 'Mrs. Roddy was crying, and the children haven't enough to eat.' *I've* cried too, Martha, and when you've sat down to a full table mine's been empty. Haven't you got farms enough, you and your husband? And ours is but a poor one at best. What more do you want from me? I've worked at it till I can work no more. I never thought at one time that it would come to this, that you'd be riding past and me begging of you barefooted. There's nobody living that knows what I once was but you, Martha, and you'll see me without a roof to my head, nor nowhere to turn to in the world. I wouldn't do it to *you*, Martha. If you begged anything from me, I wouldn't turn away. I'd think on that you'd been a girl like me once, and I'd say to myself, 'Poor Martha never thought to come to this.' If I felt myself hard and knowed you to be a bad woman, I'd say it all the same. 'I'll help her for the sake of her being a girl when I was.' But *you*, Martha, you've known of me being the byword of the country, and you never said to anybody, 'She was once as good

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as me.' You've talked of me as a thriftless woman. Where was it you learnt your hardness? Is it only when people are poor that they've got mother-pity in them? Nay, Martha, but you shall hear me now, for I'm a wretched woman that you're going to make worse. I've known sorrow for years. I've suffered things to make your heart bleed, and my own mother lived to see it. She came to see me the week before she died, and she stood by the low pasture gate with her white hair blowing in the wind,—I dursn't bring her into the house for fear of Michael,—and when she saw me, coming she turned to me, and she says, 'Ann, I'm going through the valley very soon, and I'm glad of it. I don't want my life over again; no, I don't. I wish you'd died when you was a baby, Ann, and I could lay my old head beside you and know you was safe. But you must live your life out now. There's some happy and there's more unhappy, and them that goes young is best off,' she says. She knowed what I'd gone through. Oh! if you was to think of all the hard things and all the cruel things you've ever heard tell of happen-

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ing to poor women in this world and put them all together and say 'That's what Ann Butterworth's gone through,' you wouldn't come near the truth. If you knew all, Martha, you'd come down here beside me and beg of your master to leave me alone. When they told me it was *you* that was going to turn me out like a dog, I says, 'No! I know Martha of old. She won't do that.' • Martha, help me as you'd be helped yourself. Speak to your husband for me. They say he's fond of you, and he'll do whatever you want. It'll make your heart light when you come to die if you're kind to me now. What can I call to your mind more than I have done? Think of all the pitiful things you've ever known. Say to yourself, 'The same thing might have happened to me.' Think of your father, Martha. He was a good man, a religious man, he was; he made a good prayer. Think of Miriam, Martha; pretty Miriam that had yellow hair. She died very young, but your father was fonder of her than all his children. Oh, if this won't call to your mind what you and me once was, there's nothing on earth can do it! Don't you re-

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member it was at the end of corn harvest that Miriam was lying dead? You and me was getting the men's meat ready, and your father'd gone to the field with a heavy heart. Then your mother came downstairs—she was a good woman, Martha. 'Miriam's gone,' she says, 'and no one must tell her father but me'; and she went down to the field and met him coming up with the last waggon. She stops in the middle of the road and holds out both her hands to him. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away,' she says, and then she burst out a-crying, and he took hold of her hands and they came up to the house crying like little children. You don't say a word, Martha. You've not forgotten Miriam, have you, with her pretty yellow hair? How she'd stretch it out with both hands, and say, 'I'm going to catch a sweetheart in it, Ann.' You've not forgotten, Martha? I'll go away quiet now, and you'll think it over again. You'll think better of it. I said I couldn't work any more, but I said wrong. There's a lot of work in me yet. My eldest lad's getting a big one. He'll be working soon——"

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"Now, Mrs. Butterworth," interrupted the farmer, "we've had quite enough of this. You've had the farm all these years, and you're getting worse instead of better. I'll give you till next month to find another landlord. Get on, Rosy!" and the mare, impatient of a check so near to her foal, took a step forward. But Ann stood in front of her. The farmer's wife spoke out decidedly.

"Now, Ann, you mustn't stop here any longer. I can do no more for you. I'm sorry for you——"

"May you be more sorry, Martha," said Ann. "May you remember Ann Butterworth when you come to die. May you say, 'I was near being pitiful once, but I made my heart hard.' May you know what it is to have hunger with nothing to fill it——"

"She's out of her mind," said the farmer angrily. "Stand back from the trap, I tell you." But Ann, paying no heed, went on——

"May you look in vain to your children——" Then she paused, and the next moment she laughed aloud, and pointing to the farmer's wife, she cried——

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“You never *had* a child, Martha Elliott! You never had a child in your life! *I’ve* had *seven*, I have.” Then she sprang away from the trap and went out through the field gate into the darkness.

THE TWO EVENINGS

IV

THE TWO EVENINGS

IN the North of England there are still to be seen the remains of a great forest, spreading over many acres and making, if you look at it from a little distance, a waving plume on the top of a hill. The sun, as it rises, lights up this woodland first of all the country-side, and the whole summer's day its beams glide over those billows of green boughs, yet cannot penetrate within until the evening, as it sinks and sends its light upward underneath the branches. The hill crowned by the forest is the only one in the country, and a great playground for the wind, which, as often as it can, leaves the singing grasses below, and fluting its way up the slope of the hill, keeps up a mighty humming in the tops of the forest trees. But it cannot reach the forest cornfield unless it comes round the

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other side and whistles over the hill's right shoulder. There it will find the largest cornfield in the country-side and the one last to ripen, so that the farmers of the district have a saying that you can see the end of the harvest through the stooks in the forest-field. One can sight this cornfield from three sides of the hill, shining on the hazy autumn mornings like a great sandbank breaking through the mist.

Late one autumn evening the harvesters were preparing to leave the forest-field. The end of the harvest was at last in sight, for the stooks were standing now in quiet rows, with each its long shadow beside it, but the men worked late, for who could tell how soon those distant and ominous rumblings in the heavens would gather in volume, and those clouds, growing every day deeper in hue, break over the earth in drenching showers! The air was saturated with the heat of three rainless weeks, and the sun, glowing all day like fiery metal full in the faces of the labourers, now in its last moments suffused the whole landscape with a living light, which surrounded the

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trees and travelled over the fields, making the short stems of stubble shine from the root like a myriad burnished pipes for the breath of the wind to tune. The farmer and his three sons left their work, and taking their coats on their arms, began to ascend the hill, skirting the lower edge of the standing corn. Two harvesters went with them to their homes on the other side of the hill. The remaining labourer, a young peasant with a face burnt to the colour of mahogany by the fierce autumn sun, with a sinewy and muscular frame, and an expression of no great intelligence, but of simplicity and candour, went across through the quiet heaps of corn towards the forest, which lay on the left side of the field, and which now, with its avenues of grey pillars, its shadowed roof and its deep stillness, resembled a vast, empty church. Its leaves floated upon the air soundless and motionless, save where a furtive movement under some branch betrayed where a wild bird watched his progress.

The peasant, whose name was Mat Styan, climbed a stile on the right of the forest, and

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dropped into a bridle-path which led to the high-road between two coverts. Now that, his work ended, his face was towards his home, he began slowly to remember that he had left his wife Barbara unwell and that he had set out to work early in the morning in order to fetch his mother to sit with her during his absence, for she had been for some days low-spirited and moping. The incessant labour of the day had almost driven the thought of his home from his mind, for, since he had but little imagination, he could with difficulty recall what was no longer before his eyes. But as soon as the recollection of the morning returned to him, he determined to go homeward by way of his mother's cottage to ask her what she thought of his wife whom he dearly loved and to whom he had been married two years. Thinking also (for here his affection stood him in place of his wit, of which he had not too much) that by doing so his wife would be left too long without a companion, he set off immediately at a run in the direction of his mother's house, to shorten thus the time of the errand.

As he reached the level below the hill and

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came out on the other side of the forest, it seemed as though he had left the autumn behind him on the hill-slope, for here the young clover had sprung up in the stubble-fields and the earth was as green as any meadow in June. The night was beginning to come up out of the east, and a little wind came with it and was caught in the clover. Mat ran with all his speed along the high-road until he could see his mother's cottage standing back in the field, with its windows unlighted and no one stirring about it. At this he began to fear that things had gone ill since his mother had not returned, and increasing his speed, he turned back along the road which he had just travelled, hoping to meet her upon her way home. He reached the end of the lane leading to his own house, however, without meeting anyone, but as he came within sight of his cottage, with its lower window lighted, he fancied he could see someone standing beside the gate. When he came nearer—near enough to distinguish his mother in the thick twilight—she spoke to him.

“Is that you there, Mat?” she asked.

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"Yes," he replied, coming up to the gate.

At the sound of his voice someone, apparently a woman, called from within the cottage.

"Be quick, dada, we're waiting," and at that his mother laughed. Mat stopped short at the strange voice and speech and turned to his mother to ask who the visitor was, but she, laughing still, said—

"Go inside and look for yourself, lad." So at that Mat opened the door and saw that a young woman, whom he recognised as his wife's sister, Jane, was sitting by the fire, and stretched on her knees was a newly-born child.

His mother, following close on his heels, looked with delight on the laughing woman who rose and held out the baby to Mat, saying—

"We'd begun to think you wouldn't be here this side midnight, but since you've come we'll try what sort of a nurse you'll make."

"Is it mine?" asked Mat, flushing a deep red and beginning to tremble.

"Well! he doesn't belong to *me*," said the young woman, still holding out the child.

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Mat stretched out both arms stiffly, and she laid the child upon them, who, feeling immediately the insecurity of the hold, began to cry. The young woman snatched the baby back and hushed its cries, while Mat, bewildered and enchanted at the same moment, stood stock still, with his arms still stretched out, staring with all his eyes at the baby and not daring to stir lest he should in some way hurt it. At that moment a voice so feeble as to be almost inaudible, yet so different from the voices in the room as to cause an immediate silence, was heard beyond the closed door. His mother took Mat by the arm and pointed to the inner door, beyond which his wife Barbara was lying.

"Be very quiet," she said, "and don't stop long." Mat went slowly within, while his mother returned to the fire and sat down beside the younger woman, who was preparing the baby for sleep.

A lamp was burning in the inner room, with a high-backed chair before it to shade the bed. Its shadow covered half the room, giving it such an unfamiliar appearance in that dim

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light, that Mat, bewildered by the occurrences of the evening, scarcely knew it for his own, until his wife Barbara spoke again to him and called his name. She lay so still when he went up to her, that if it had not been for her eyes, which looked so kindly at him, he would have been greatly afraid, for it was so strange a thing to see Barbara, who was always bright and active, lying so still and silent, with only that kind smile coming and going on her face. It was all so strange, and he could think of nothing to say to her, that he gave a sob, and at that sound Barbara stirred and laid her quiet hand on his.

"It's over now, Mat," she said feebly ; "you mustn't cry."

"Was it bad, Barbara?" asked Mat in a whisper.

"It was humbling," said Barbara, almost inaudibly ; "I feel changed for good and all. I never could have thought it would make such a difference."

She closed her eyes, but opened them instantly, and looked with a radiant smile at Mat.

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"Can't you hear him?" she asked, and when Mat listened he could hear a little piping cry from the next room.

"They'll be bringing him in soon," whispered Barbara, her eyes still looking towards the door. "Kiss me good-night, Mat, and come again before you go to work to-morrow."

Mat kissed her and returned to the other room, where the two women were sitting, his mother making way for him that he might see the baby better. His ingenuous face grew radiant, and he gazed at the tiny creature so unconscious of him as though he could never take his eyes from it. The two women, laughing between whiles at Mat's awkwardness and astonishment, talked of their arrangements for the nursing. Mat's mother was to stay the night, while Jane, who had two children of her own, would return the following morning. They talked joyfully of the baby's strength and size, and of its lusty crying, and Mat's mother told tales of the time when Mat himself was a baby. Presently the younger woman laid the child on its grandmother's knee, and prepared to go. She went into the inner room

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to bid her sister good-night, kissed the baby, and saying good-bye to Mat, who forgot to answer, ran out to her home in a neighbouring cottage. The older woman, taking the light with her, soon retired to the inner room with the child, and Mat, thus deprived of his occupation, and exhausted by his day's work and the unusual experiences of the evening, lay down to sleep upon the settle.

Before sunrise he was awakened by the sound of his child's crying, and while he lay wondering what baby was out of doors in the lane so early, recollection came to him, and he rose and dressed, his mind full of happy and good thoughts. The surprise and joy of the previous night returned to him, and he opened the door of his wife's room with his heart beating fast. There were no shadows in the room this morning. His mother had just reseated herself in the chair by the window, and the first ray of the sun was travelling along the wall like a golden wand thrust into the room. Mat moved softly to the bedside, where his wife was awake and looking towards him. Her smile was as tranquil as the peace of the

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room, and she seemed to have been lying awake expecting him. As he looked upon her exhausted but happy face all his words left him once more. But Barbara took his hand in her weak grasp and began to tell him that she already felt much better, and that in a few weeks she would sit again by his side in the kitchen as she used to do, and how she could see the end of the lane as she lay in bed, and would watch him as he went to work and came home at nightfall. So Mat kissed her and looked again at the sleeping infant with its little fists doubled above the coverlet, and went out to his day's work, leaving Barbara smiling her contented smile ; nor did he forget when he reached the end of the lane to turn round and wave his hat, so that she could see that he thought of her. Then, quiet and happy, he went steadily towards the forest-field.

The morning sun had risen above the horizon, and his rays, tremulous through the mist, had reached the forest top. The earth was full of fresh and happy sights, and one by one, as the sun conquered the mist, the wild creatures began to appear in the field, the

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dew fell from the cups of the meadow-flowers, the gossamer disappeared from the hedges, and the birds awoke and sang madly. But Mat's thoughts still remained in the tranquil room he had left, and his one wish was to finish his day's work and return to his home, in which there had alighted that fragile little blossom he already longed to look upon again. A tiny boy, half dressed, ran out from a cottage by the roadside pursued by his sister, who caught and carried him shrieking with laughter into the house, and Mat laughed aloud in sudden sympathy, for his happy fancy pictured the time when his little son would run in the same way about his own cottage. He scarcely thought at all of his wife Barbara, save to be glad that the worst was now over, and that she would soon be standing at the door to welcome him in the evening, as she had formerly done.

In the country, what happens to one is everyone's business, and Jane, Barbara's sister, had spread the news that Mat's baby was born. So that the harvesters already in the field stopped their work when Mat emerged from the shadow of the forest and set up a cheer to

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greet him, and a smile passed from one man to another as though a ray of light had travelled across their faces. They gathered round Mat with their jests as he reached them. Every man had his joke ready, and Mat, good-humoured and sheepish, but inwardly delighted, listened till they had joked to their satisfaction. Throughout the long day they could none of them forget Mat's little son, and he served them for much merriment during the heat of the harvesting. At midday the farmer's wife came to speak to him, telling him that she had a parcel for Barbara, which she would send to the field in the evening. All day he worked in a maze, his thoughts full of his home as he had entered it the night before, with its warm fire, and the tiny creature lying upon the young woman's knees, the laughter of the women, and the joy of his wife Barbara. He was constantly recalling it to his mind, as one having unexpectedly found a treasure, opens its case again and yet again to be certain that it is really in the place where he discovered it. At the end of the day, amid the renewed jokes of the men and taking

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the parcel for Barbara, he was the first to leave the harvest-field.

It was again a beautiful evening, one of those autumn evenings when the sun does not appear to set, but to dissipate itself and become absorbed in the pale cloudless sky, bringing no relief from the heat by its withdrawal. The atmosphere was stifling, and Mat walked bareheaded for freer breathing. The cattle in the pastures were as motionless as the fields on which they lay. A windmill, painted white, stood with its arms transfixed at the entrance to the wood like a giant Calvary before a haunted place. The sun-dried edges of the ponds, baked to a pale lavender colour by the heat, the brown grass of the pastures, scored like a skating-pond, the infrequent twitterings of the birds, the sounds of occupation carried from distant fields—as though the country had become hollow—all told of the heavy heat and the languor of the autumn. The surprise and bewilderment of Mat's thoughts had subsided, and in their place steady joy and content suffused his whole being. He knew that his

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welcome at home was assured, and at each step which brought him nearer to it he grew more and more cheerful. When he came within sight of his cottage gate he saw his mother standing there again waiting for him. This time she came to meet him, and while they were still out of earshot of the house, she asked—

“Haven't you met Jane on your way?”

“No,” answered Mat tranquilly, for Jane's cottage being further along the lane, he took it for granted that he would have met her in the ordinary course of things if she had been returning to her home. His mother made no movement to return to the house, but stood looking past him as if watching for Jane, and barring thus his way along the lane.

“Jane had something to tell you,” she said at last.

“Well, since she's not here, I'll get on and see Barbara,” said Mat, finding that his mother did not stir. But as he tried to move onward she laid her hand on his arm and said—

“Don't go in yet, lad; come down the road with me, and we'll find Jane; she's got something to tell you.”

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"Is anything wrong with the child?" asked Mat, his knees shaking under him.

"No," replied his mother quickly, "the child couldn't be better; but it'll be just as well to see Jane before you go into the house."

"Are you telling me true? Let me look at the child," said Mat.

"Nay, the child's asleep, and you mustn't wake him," replied his mother, and taking his arm she led him further from the cottage. Mat noticed that she leaned heavily upon him, and said—

"There's no occasion for you to come with me, mother; I can find Jane by myself; you walk tired."

"No, I'll come with you," said his mother; "it's only age that makes me walk heavy. I'm an old woman now, lad."

Mat said no more, but started down the lane, and they had gone but a rood or two from the cottage when he saw a woman leaning against a gate and looking away from them.

"That looks like Jane," said Mat; "it *is* Jane, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's Jane," replied his mother, and

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seeing that Jane was looking away from them, he called her name. She turned round slowly when she heard it, but made no attempt to come to meet them.

"She's not in a hurry," said Mat; "her news'll keep, it seems."

"No it won't," said his mother, with a sudden cry. "I said, 'I'm an old woman, and old people doesn't know what young ones is feeling. I'll let Jane, that's Barbara's sister, tell it him'; but it's too heavy on her to be told. It's for your mother that nursed you to tell it. I brought you away from the house where the dead lies to tell it you; but here or there it must be told now and not hid. Barbara died an hour ago, Mat. I'd have laid my old head in her place if I could have kept it from you, but it's your right to be told if my heart's broken in the telling."

When Jane heard the old woman cry out and saw that she had broken the sad news to her son, she came slowly towards them, and her heavy swollen eyes looked mournfully at Mat. He, looking from one sad woman to the other, saw that they had some deep sorrow

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between them, but did not seem to understand that it was his. Jane's face was white and weary, and her lips still trembled with weeping. The old woman still held Mat's arm in her grasp. A little girl who had been coming along the lane stood watching them, afraid to pass them.

"Barbara's gone, Mat," said Jane, her voice hesitating and thick. "She told me to give you her love. It was all over too quick for us to send for you, or we'd have done it. I couldn't believe it for a long time—she seemed so well. I'd only left the room a minute, and when I came in again she spoke out quite sudden and tried to sit up. 'Jane,' she said, 'it's not to be. I'm leaving you with the child,' she said. 'I'm sorry for Mat, for he'll miss me sorely.' I went to the bedside because I thought she'd taken a fancy into her head, but she wouldn't be said nay to. She asked me for the baby, and I went to get him and gave him into her arms, and she kissed him and told me she'd put his short clothes in the third drawer from the top, and I should find them there when the time came to shorten him; and then she begun

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to talk about you, Mat, and she said that no woman living had had a better or lovinger husband than she'd had, and I was to give her best love to you and tell you she'd have been glad to stop and look after you and the baby, but it wasn't to be ; and then, after a bit, she said your mother must comfort you. So then she kissed the baby again and laid him down beside her and said, ' Kiss me good-bye, Jane. You'll take care of the baby as I'd have done for one of yours if you'd been taken.' So I kissed her, never thinking but what she'd got a sick idea into her head, and she lay down for a minute ; but she sat up again and told me to ask them at the farm for the milk of one cow for the baby—and that was the last she spoke, for she shut her eyes, and when I went over to her the next minute she was gone. I know it's heaviest on you, Mat, and the hardest work I've ever done in my life is to tell it you ; but she was my sister as well, and younger than me, and I never thought of her being taken."

When Jane could say no more for crying, Mat repeated his mother's words as though he had heard nothing besides: " Barbara's lying

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dead in the house," and looking from one sorrowful woman to the other, turned quickly and ran back to the cottage as though he had just heard of some evil he could prevent by his presence there. His footsteps rang for a moment on the hard road, and they saw the light extinguished in the doorway as he entered the cottage. Jane would have run after him, but the old woman restrained her.

"Leave him alone, lass," she said ; "we've done all we can. He must see her alone before he'll know what we've told him. It isn't in nature to believe that them's dead at night we left alive in the morning. We'll go after him slowly and give him time to see her, and if God above sends comfort He'll send it, and if not, it's a sorrowful day."

They followed him slowly to the cottage therefore, Jane crying bitterly for the double sorrow, and the old woman with heavy steps. When they entered the kitchen it was quite dark, but the inner door was ajar, the light from it lighting up one side of the dark room. The old woman struck a match, lit the lamp, and began to prepare a meal, while Jane sat

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still, crying. There was not a sound from the inner room where Mat was. When the old woman had finished her preparations she drew a chair to the fireplace beside Jane, and sat motionless, with arms folded and head bowed. Presently the baby's crying aroused them, and Mat's mother slowly crossed the room and went within the half-open door. As soon as she entered she called Jane's name as if in fear, and Jane ran to her. She saw Mat sitting by the side of the bed, and in his arms, as he had taken her from it, was his dead wife Barbara. His arms were round her, and her head rested on his shoulder, and he gazed at her face so absorbedly that when they spoke to him he did not answer. They took the baby from the cradle, and went trembling into the other room. For three hours they sat there in fear while Mat remained holding his wife in his arms and not seeming to hear or understand when they spoke to him. At last his mother took the baby to the bedside where he sat with his dead wife on his knees, and laid the child's warm cheek against his.

"Here's the baby Barbara left you, Mat,"

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she said. "Let Barbara have her rest, and take the child, for he's no mother to take him. You must be father and mother both to him."

Mat started as the baby's warm cheek touched his, but he did not take his eyes from the still face on his shoulder.

"Lay her down and let her rest, lad," urged his mother.

He obeyed slowly, still speechless ; but when his mother laid the living child in his arms his tears fell abundantly.

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HOW curious are those chance meetings which make one acquainted with the miseries of others, and force upon one the responsibility of their troubles !

As Ellen Riley was returning home from marketing to her house above the sadler's shop she met a girl who had been in her class at the board school, and whom she had not seen for many years. She was pleased, as one always is pleased, at such an occurrence, and crossed the road to speak with her. She was the wife of a young sadler in the district, a well-built, erect young woman, with a pleasing appearance of healthiness rare in that locality. The other girl, Lizzie Brighthouse, was small and meagre, with the pallid, immobile face of a working woman. Ellen learnt that she was a machinist in a factory on the other side of

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the river, and that she was to be married in three weeks to a journeyman joiner. She promised to visit her before that time in order to see her wedding-clothes.

She had no sooner left her than she met a woman whom she saw constantly, and to whom she spoke of this chance meeting. The woman was astonished. "Lizzie Brighouse," she exclaimed; "have you never seen her before? Why she passes here every Wednesday regular! I see her many a time when I'm about. I passed her twice this morning. 'Well, Lizzie,' I says, 'I hope we shall meet in heaven!' I suppose she's being married soon. They're living somewhere off Saturday Street I was told, but they're very poor," and with that she went on.

Ellen went home, and, passing through the shop where her husband was cutting leather, went upstairs with her purchases. She examined them, put them away, and then went into the bedroom beyond the kitchen. The news of Lizzie Brighouse's wedding had recalled her own, and she was going to look at her wedding-dress again. Unlike the majority of working

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women, she had never worn it after her wedding. She had taken pains at first to shake it every week to keep moths away from it, but it was now three months since she had looked at it. She pulled open a drawer and took out the dress, a grey cashmere with a white sash, which she had had made by a dressmaker. She shook it out, and, holding it in front of her, looked in the mirror. Smiling, she refolded it and put it back in the drawer. Then she returned to the house-place to prepare for her husband.

She decided to visit her old acquaintance the next evening. She waited until the factories closed at night, and at seven o'clock prepared to set out. While she was dressing her husband came into the room. He was a tall, good-looking fellow, sheepish and honest. His wife's satisfied face was quite justified. She looked round and said—

“I'm going to see Lizzie Brighouse, a girl as I used to know. She's being married in three weeks.”

“Lizzie Brighouse! That's the name of the girl Charley Timpson's marrying.”

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"Do *you* know her as well? I never did! It seems as if everybody knew she was being married but me!"

"No, I don't know her, I only know Charley. It slipped my mind till you spoke of Lizzie Brighthouse. I suppose they're very poor."

Ellen left him and started on her errand. Outside her door she was immediately in the main road, visible on either side of her for almost a mile, like the level corridor of some vast hotel, lighted all on the ground-floor as if for a fête, whose top reached to heaven and was invisible, where guests of all nations passed and repassed, becoming known to one another as chance or the master of the hotel brought them together, entering each his own numbered room as he had hired it. Factories, spare and gaunt as toil, with their black sentinels behind them, had fallen heavily asleep at sundown, but the great furnaces which warmed that vast building were awake, and beat against the iron doors like caged beasts, filling the air with the growl and thud of their hampered, resenting energy.

Ellen discovered Saturday Street behind the

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main thoroughfare, a narrow and dark *cul de sac* lighted by a single lamp hung high on the wall above the entrance to a court. She lingered at the end of the street, and, as a child about to enter a dark room turns to reassure himself of the lighted passage behind him, she looked up and down the animated road she was leaving before she ventured along the unpaved and gloomy alley. It was like entering a cavern in the daylight. Beneath the lamp on a painted stone was the name ' Bullock's Buildings,' and, counting the houses from this point, she knocked at the sixth and end house in the row. She was admitted by a child, who ran out into the street as she entered.

The two women in the small and miserable room greeted her with that hurried and excessive cordiality which betrays embarrassment. Both had been weeping. Lizzie's eyes were swollen as if from violent crying, and her mother, a thin, spent woman, wiped the tears off her face with her apron as she rose to greet Ellen.

"This is my mother," said Lizzie in a thick voice; "this is the young woman I told you was coming to see my wedding——"

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"You've come to see Lizzie's wedding-clothes?" put in her mother; "you may as well know at once that you've had your journey for nothing. Her father's just pawned them!" Lizzie suddenly dropped on to the only chair in the room, where she sat sobbing aloud with that uncontrolled weakness which succeeds long and exhausting weeping. Ellen immediately knelt beside her.

"Lizzie, love," she said, "nay, Lizzie, love, don't cry like that; I can't bear to hear you. It'll all come right, you'll see."

"She's not so used to it as I am," said the mother, crying feebly. "Young folks is always thinking it won't happen to them. I used to think the same once. He'd come crying and saying he was a bad lad, and then I'd think it was all right. I've broke my temper over him many a time, but he's never any different. I'd never 'ave married him if I'd been able to work for myself, a man that'll never come to anything. And she's a good girl, is Lizzie! I never had a word back from her in my life! She's been a good daughter to me. That's what I said to her young man when he

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began courting. 'Yes,' he says, 'I believe you.' I've had many a good cry to myself thinking of the good young man Lizzie's going to have; not like me with her father. I've sat listening till I wish I could turn to stone and hear no more. There's him and a man that lodges here. His wife left him and he took to drink from sorrow. He doesn't do at all well by me. He can't spend his money on drink and pay his lodgings as well. But it's not like being married to him. I've followed *him* through the streets all day begging for twopence for a loaf. There's Lizzie's sat up at nights doing extra jobs to get money for her clothes. She's not touched a penny of her wages. She should 'ave had every penny of it, but where I should 'ave turned to without it, I can't say. I should 'ave known by this time what might happen, but you never do till it's too late. I never thought he'd touch Lizzie's things; but she'll be rid of him in three weeks. I don't know where I shall look to when I've not got her wages, but she shan't lose her chance through my fault."

Ellen, a member of the respectable working-

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class, knew less than a rich lady of the troubles of the very poor. She hurried home bewildered, considering which of her own clothes she could spare to replace those stolen from Lizzie, whom she fully intended to help, but able to think of nothing but her own wedding-dress. When she reached home, she found there her mother, who had been waiting for her all the evening. She was a small, comely woman, with red hair, very neat in her dress and alert in her movements, with that utter dissimilarity of appearance to Ellen one so often sees between mothers and daughters. Her voice was strong and decided, but pleasant to listen to. She began at once—

“Well, lass, so you’ve come ! I should have had to go home in another five minutes. Where have you put yourself all this time ?”

“I’ve been seeing Lizzie Brighthouse. William, her father’s pawned all her wedding-clothes for drink, and the marriage is only three weeks off. Her mother was crying like a child.”

“That’s bad !” said William.

“Did they beg of you ?” demanded her mother.

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"No, they asked for naught, but I shall give 'em something," said Ellen.

"I'll be bound you will," returned her mother. "I daresay they knew very well what a simpleton they'd got hold of when they got *you* there! How do you know there ever was any wedding-clothes?"

"Lizzie told me so," said Ellen.

"And you believe everything you're told, do you?" said her mother. "If it's the same girl I'm thinking of, she's got a sister that's not so good as she might be. You'll be getting a bad name before you know, if you're not careful."

"Hold on a minute!" interrupted William.

"Oh yes!" retorted Ellen's mother, "I know very well that *you* won't have a word said against her, but she was my daughter before she was your wife. She's just her father over again! You'd only to cry a bit and he'd give you everything he'd got on and go naked himself. It's a good thing you've had a mother to look after you, or there's no telling where you'd have been. And what are you going to give them? I can't see that you can afford to spend William's wages so ready as all that."

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"I can't give them any money," said Ellen doggedly, "but Lizzie shan't be shamed at her wedding. I'll give her the dress I was married in."

"You'll not!" said her mother emphatically. "Give away a good dress like that, and only worn once! Are you going out of your mind? Give her one as you've worn, if you *are* so rich you can give away your dresses. I suppose you've twenty dresses that cost half a crown a yard that you think so little of this one? Let me look at your hand! Oh, you've not given away your wedding-ring yet, haven't you? I'm surprised you don't give her that as well. Now, just listen to me, Ellen! If you give away your wedding-dress you'll never have any luck in your life again, and you'll not deserve any. And who's Lizzie Brighthouse? If you can't do without giving away your dresses, why don't you give them to your own sister? She'll be ready enough to have them, I'll warrant her."

"Sarah Ann's got a good home, and earns a good wage, and doesn't need 'em the same," said Ellen.

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"Yes, she *has* got a good home," returned her mother; "but she wouldn't have had, nor you neither, if her mother had been so ready to part with all her things. You've had too soft a bed all your life; that's what's the matter with *you*. You don't know what it is to work for a thing same as *I've* had to do. Many a day I've spent washing and ironing, and you crying in the cradle till I've been sorry to hear you. William, speak to your wife, she'll be giving away you next."

"Nay, *I've* nothing to do with it. It wurn't *my* money as bought it," said William uneasily.

"You're as bad as she is," said his mother-in-law, with a short laugh. "You should give her a taste of tongue-sauce now and again to sharpen her up a bit! Well, dress or no dress, I shall have to get home. Now, just you see, Ellen, that you're not so foolish as to give away your things in that fashion. You'd better have been cleaning that kettle up instead of gadding about. It's none too clean, nor the hearthstone neither."

She went out, and Ellen immediately rose and went into the bedroom. After walking up

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and down the kitchen twice, her husband followed her. She kept her back turned towards him, so that he had no clue in her face. He began doubtingly: "Never heed her, Ellen. You know her ways. She must always be talking."

"It's not mother, it's the dress," said Ellen, going to the drawer and bringing out the grey frock. William rubbed his hands on his jacket and carefully took hold of a corner. Then a broad smile appeared on his face, and he looked at his wife. Ellen, looking up, smiled also. William rubbed his mouth once or twice, smiling all the more, and at last jerked out—

"Put it on, Ellen."

Without speaking, Ellen put on the dress, bringing out moreover from the corner of the drawer a silver brooch in the shape of a heart to fasten her collar. William's smile became a deep and genuine laugh.

"Yes, there's nothing different," he said, "only you was more timid then, same as if you thought I was going to hurt you. Eh? did you, Ellen? Did you think I was going to hurt you?"

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"Nay, I thought of nothing but thee," said Ellen.

"Did you?" said William, delighted; "you never told me."

"You never asked me."

"Ellen!"

"Yes."

"Ellen!"

"What?"

"Give me a kiss, Ellen!"

"Come and take one!"

"I like presents best."

"You can wait till Christmas, then! The little brooch looks nice, doesn't it?"

"Beautiful! Give me a kiss, Ellen!"

"Did you think I looked well in a grey frock?"

"I was that proud, I didn't hardly know where to put myself. I've wore a grey tie on Sundays ever since, to bethink me of it. Why didn't *you* wear the dress again?"

"I hadn't the heart to dirty it," said Ellen.

"It seems a shame to give it away," said William; "it's like as if nobody else had a right to it but you. I'd like to have seen you

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wear it again myself. Did you *say* you'd give it her?"

"No, I said nothing at all. I came away too quick. But I felt as though I'd promised it to her all the same," said Ellen.

"You don't get that many frocks yourself, Ellen," said William dubiously.

"I used to think so," replied Ellen; "but oh, William, if you'd seen inside that house! Not a stick of furniture hardly! I'll never say we're poor again, like I have done. See here, William! I went along to-night a happy girl. There was no one could have said I hadn't got a good home and a good husband. I never thought everybody wasn't the same. I never was told anything like that before, and when I saw Lizzie crying I felt as though I couldn't do too much. I think I must give the dress, William. I haven't been such a good girl as I ought by a long way."

"You're the best girl as *I've* ever knowed, and a good wife to *me*," returned William vigorously.

"If you think so, William, don't say anything against me giving the dress. I feel

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myself wanting to keep it all the time, and I shall be doing it if I don't watch myself. I should never feel happy again if I didn't do something for Lizzie after all I've had done for me, and this is the only thing I *can* do. I'll take it off now and wrap it up, and then I can take it in the morning. Can you get me a piece of paper big enough?"

William brought a newspaper, and stood watching her while she wrapped up the dress.

"I begrudge it, you know, for your sake, Ellen," he said.

"Don't tell me what I'm trying not to think," replied Ellen. "Now it's all ready. I'll take it before she goes to work in the morning."

Ellen woke before daylight and lay watching the window. As soon as the grey streak at one side of it seemed to be no longer stationary, but to be moving along the wall, she rose and dressed, and taking her parcel, went out into the street. A wind met her as she went, and above her the unquiet shapes of clouds whitened the sky. The moon, too faint to give light, still remained—a pale ghost riding the clouds. The morning was rapidly astir in the sky, but below

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in the street the dusk seemed to spread deeper. Workpeople were one by one turning out of doors, but quietly and swiftly, as to some secret meeting at dawn. Here and there the factories, full of windows, glittered like hollow shells covering flaming hearts. But these were not the magical streets of the previous night. The dawn was moving nearer, raising the city from sleep turret by turret, then, by an imperceptible change in the clouds, the sky had withdrawn to infinite distance, and appeared like the dark and troubled reverie of some awful Power over the unending, impotent toil of the human race.

Ellen saw Lizzie turn the corner of Saturday Street as she approached and walk rapidly away from her. At this she began to run after her, calling her name. Lizzie stopped, and came back to meet her.

"Ellen Riley!" she exclaimed, "is aught the matter?"

"Nothing much," said Ellen. "I wanted to give you this for a wedding-present. You can open it when you get to your work." Lizzie took the parcel with mechanical thanks, and then, looking up suddenly, she asked—

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"What have you given me, Ellen?"

"It's the dress I was married in, that's all," replied Ellen. "I'd have liked to give you more, but I hope you'll be as happy at your wedding as I was at mine."

"You're a good girl, Ellen," said Lizzie, "but I can't forshame to take this. It's not the same as any sort of a dress to you; and I'd fairly made up my mind to do without one. I shan't miss it so much."

"Yes, take it," urged Ellen; "I've only wore it once."

"There's only one thing that *would* make me take it," replied her friend, "and that is to save *him* from being shamed of me. We've kept my father from him as much as we could. We don't see much of him ourselves, only when he wants money. I'd only take it to save Charley, and I shall never forshame to look at you again if I do."

"Take it, then," repeated Ellen, "and may you be as happy a girl in it as I've been."

"I shall want a bit of time to learn how to be happy," said Lizzie, "but you've given me the first bit of it with this. It's as if I'm

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going to have luck with this dress. I don't know how to thank you, Ellen, I'm that ashamed."

"You're quite welcome to it," said Ellen. "Good-bye," leaving her with the parcel in her hands, and walking away quickly, not stopping till she reached her home, where William, awaiting her, saw her come in with tears in her eyes.

"See here, Ellen, I'm going to fetch it back," he said, reaching his cap down.

"No, don't, William," said Ellen, catching him by the arm. "I'd do it over again this minute. I'm foolish to feel this way, but it's almost same as if I'd buried a child."

THE SEA'S DOMINION

VI

THE SEA'S DOMINION

HOW inexplicable is that sensation of relief which comes as one stands again, after years spent inland, before the prospect of distance and motion which abides on the face of the sea! I am fascinated by the sea more than by any other phenomenon. The mountains are sublime, but their strength is too unmoved, and the forest, with its multitude of eyes and tumult of leaves, is too distracting to hold me. But in the sea there is the might and age of the mountains and the sound and motion of the forest. What especially attracts me is the suggestion of resisting forces in the place where land and water meet, and as I stood to-night looking over the empty shore, where a vague channel guarded by lights made its way through the sandbanks to the town, I was again impressed

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by the eternal wakefulness of the sea, which exacts from the land such incessant and painful vigilance, and by the desperate chance of those who, forsaking the kinder harvest of the earth, seek their fortune in its waters.

The remembrance occurs to me of a tale told amid the loneliness of those dimly-lit seas of the north, where a whole alien world of aquatic life unfolds and dies ; whose stillness a passing ship scarcely awakens, and whose sun shines as sterile as its moon or stars. It was a summer's night, one of those nights which in the north are never quite dark. The sun had gone down before we sailed from a dreary little seaport in the west of Scotland, and the tranquil evening was slow to gather upon us. The hills were drawn first into the shadow, and then the twilight advanced upon the sea with a passage as delicate as the path of the wind over the water. We were upon the floor of a silken sea, upon whose surface two boats, overtaken by the evening, made for the shore like shining and noiseless water-creatures, leaving a widening track in their wake. For a time the lights of the lee-shore could be seen,

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swimming after us, as it seemed, like a shoal of glittering phosphorescent creatures attracted by the motion of the ship. Then the last of them dived behind the waves, and we were unwatched in the middle of that grey plain, obtruding our noisy movements among its shadows. The unresisting water fell away from the senseless rage of our paddles, heaving quietly, soundless, and echoless and as insubstantial in appearance as the grey air through which we cleft our way.

Suddenly, by the turning of a point, we came unawares upon a tiny harbour, a harbour so forgotten of the living that it seemed impossible for any life to continue within it; and the sharp stoppage of our paddles upon our approach, the silent gliding of our steamer between those high stone walls upon the dead water, served only to heighten the impression of a harbour forgotten or forsaken by the ships for some known evil or dreadful thing within it. Two long walls of stone enclosed the pale water like mighty immobile arms thrust out by the land, and each hand, as it were, of the meeting arms held now a light, ghostly and

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white against the evening sky and the wan sea. A solitary seaman, going over the side, seized an iron ladder against the face of the wall and mounted, and as we drew out from the embrace of those great arms lying upon the sea, it seemed as though no one would ever again disturb that quiet water, and the seaman, watching our withdrawal, took on the likeness of a man left by his companions to a strange and lonely fate.

Then the mist came out of the sea and shrouded the land utterly. All images became phantoms in that greyness, and all sounds faded except the occasional sinister hiss of a wave turning over beside us, like the noise of the passage of some hostile sea-monster swimming alongside. For an hour we pushed aside the haze with our clumsy prow, and then the fog, rolling from the face of the sea as it had spread itself upon it, left us in the presence of a line of hills, with one overweening mountain above them all. As we drew under the shadow of that black, tremendous hill, a cleft shore appeared at its base, and within it, as in the mouth of a cavern, lay an old lightship,

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black-hulled and of clumsy lines. A lantern hung at its slim masthead, and its name, the *Sealight*, was painted in white letters upon the dark hull. No one was stirring on board, and we looked at the rude ship as travellers in a lonely place look upon a suddenly discovered encampment of gipsies, whose natural dwelling has to them such an air of savage wildness. We drew close to the little vessel, every soul on board of us silently watching that black triangular heap on the water.

All at once a flash-light opened on some invisible headland alongside us, and at the sudden friendly act of that jocular eye, every tongue outbade its neighbour's for a hearing. The effect was like a handful of corn thrown among roosting birds. Even the seamen, taciturn by habit and inclination, began to converse among themselves, but soon, as if by a mutual impulse, the attention of all was directed towards an old sailor who was going with us to one of the islands further west, and who seemed to be relating to one of the crew standing near him some story which the sight of the old lightship had apparently revived in

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his memory. "The *Sealight*—it was the *Sealight*," occurred constantly in the narration which all were endeavouring to overhear. Then the rain, that sweeping rain of the hills, came down out of the night and drove us all under cover; and out there, in the dimly-lit cabin, with the rain all round us beating upon the sea and rising from it again like smoke, the old seafaring man told this tale of the grimness that is hidden in those seas lit by romance, of the eternally alien being whose ways the sailors seek in vain to discover, and whose sovereignty they cannot disdain for an hour.

On those tracts of the sea, where the herring-fishing is an industry, it is a poor thing if a fisherman cannot, though he start never so humbly, own his boat in the end. But among the far-away islands where the fishing is dangerous and the hauls thin, it is "catch who catch can" with the fishers. The herring-steamers, those panting and obsequious lackeys in places where the fleet is large, become important and lordly, calling irregularly to gather the thin catch from the islands, and the chances of the fishermen are as unstable as

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the way of the herring or the breeze. Their hope is in tradition and the customs of their fathers, from which they will not depart a hair's-breadth.

On one of these islands, a place of rocks and peat land and salt pools, the fishermen were standing disputing on the rough jetty at sundown. The little grey island had one hill, down which the battered stone houses seemed to have run to the shore to hear news of the sea. One had been left behind, a white speck on the hillside. The others stood in a circle on the beach looking expectantly over the waste of water and so near to it that the lines of seaweed lay almost at the doorstep. The boats lay alongside the jetty, and the men, eight sturdy, light-haired giants in blue jerseys, stood ready to go aboard. Beside them stood three old men. One, who seemed the oldest man on the island, dressed in his long oilskin coat, his fisher's cap turned up in front with the flap sheltering his neck, leaning on a stick, which he grasped with his left hand, held up his scarred right hand towards the sea with a menacing gesture.

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"Laugh or not as ye please, stout Hughie," he said to the great nonchalant giant, who at that moment swung himself into the first boat and tugged at the sail-rope, "but I tell you there's ill to follow if ye set out that way."

"There's always ill to follow if a young wan does anything," replied Hughie.

The men took their places in the boats.

"Turn her against the course of the sun and ye'll see what ye will see," called the old man after them.

"It's the first time ever it was done on this island," said one of the old men to his companion in a disturbed voice. But the men in the boats were already in deep water. The brown sails were unhoused, and the two men swinging the long, pliant oars propelled the boats forward on a calm sea, lazily making forward against the course of the sun as if prolonging this defiance of all the centuries. The three old men, grim and disapproving, watched the sails turn first misshapen and then disappear in the mist lying out on the sombre water. Hughie's wife came out from the last of the battered stone cottages and joined them.

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The boats were no longer visible, and the sea itself seemed rising in mist. When she heard their warning she was afraid and looked anxiously over the sea. But nothing could be seen of the boats, and she soon returned to her house. The old men left the jetty, still lamenting this dire breach of tradition, and in an hour or two the night had swallowed up the tiny island and the sea spreading around it.

In the early morning, at the hour for the fishers' return, the old men and all the women of the island came out to the end of the rude pier to watch for the boats in the grey twilight. They stood, an anxious group pierced with cold, their faces towards that reluctant and alien dawn stirring above the leaden sea. Hughie's little bare-legged son was the first to see the black specks over the rollers as he stood among the women with his hands in his pockets. He pointed them out to his mother, inconstant specks like corks far down the Sound. As the smacks came nearer and took the shape of boats, there appeared no sign of hurt about them, but they came heavily and slowly through the sea. The

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men could soon be seen rowing, though the sails seemed full of wind. One circumstance was immediately noted by that little company, accustomed to read signs of harvest from afar. The boats were very low in the water ; there had been a good haul. But why were they bringing it to the island? Where was the screw-steamer which plied in these waters?

The steamer had not met them, it appeared, but she had often of late made straight for the island to gather the catch. Stout Hughie leapt on to the jetty triumphant. The catch was enormous. There had not been such a haul for ten years. The boats could hardly carry that mass of gleaming, living herring. The women, at the sight of the haul, were delirious with joy. The bare-legged children capered about dragging creels hither and thither. The men swung the great baskets to and fro lightening the ships and the herring slid, an incessant and glittering stream, on to the beach. Stout Hughie's powerful arms worked with the rest, a satisfied smile on his face meanwhile. He looked round with a tolerant glance at the old man gazing grimly at the haul and said interrogatively—

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"There's nothing wrong wi' the herrin'?"

The old man shook his head grudgingly and giving a grim nod pointed down the Sound.

"There's a storm on us," he said.

"That's so," returned Hughie, with a glance over the sea; "but we're in time."

"Where's the *Sealight*?" asked the old man moodily.

"She'll come, never fear," answered Hughie with confidence.

The wind and the storm came up the Sound with the tide which had begun to flow, and its entrance was even now hidden by a curtain of rain. The livid sky, bowing upon the sea, was reflected in it. The breakers inshore beat more heavily, and the brown sea was dappled with white. They had not finished unloading the boats before the storm was on them. Wind and rain and tide leapt up in fury. The flowing sea had become a boiling, menacing flood, sweeping on as if to wash the island away. The shore had begun to smoke like a lime-pit. The wind yelled and trumpeted with a thousand echoes of the storm. The light sand blown by it struck the face like a hundred sharp whips,

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and the grey rollers swung themselves on and on over the banks until they broke with incessant booming upon the jetty. The boats, lunging by the side of the quay, could be unfastened with difficulty. The women were driven indoors. Men, with their heads down before the storm, hauled the boats to the beach where the mountain of herring gleamed like a steel triangle. The sullen booming of the rollers never ceased, even when the wind drew back with the ebbing of the tide. The plunging, struggling waves shouldered each other to the shore like a crowd in panic. The doors of the stone houses standing towards the sea were shut to the beating of the wind upon them. Only stout Hughie and the fishermen remained in a group behind the jetty, their caps tight over their ears and their broad backs to the storm.

By the middle of the morning the wind had dropped and the screen of rain had unrolled from before the entrance to the Sound. But the sea never ceased its chafing and the waves were as heavy as ever. Hughie's wife, looking out from her window, saw the men dragging

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a rowing-boat down the shore to the sea. At the sight of it she ran out to them and caught Hughie by the arm.

"Don't go out again," she entreated.

"It's the *Sealight* we're going after," said Hughie, looking down at her.

"Don't go," she urged. "Whether ye bring trouble to the fishing or no, Hughie, it's sore trouble I'll have if the sea gets my man."

"Trouble? There's no trouble here nor there either," said stout Hughie, as, seizing his chance, he sprang into the leaping boat and steadied her with the oar. His mate scrambled after him, and a receding wave dragged the boat into deep water. The men and women all came running to the jetty to watch the progress of that laborious passage through the sea. The rowing of those two giants seemed like that of children against the weight of the tide, and a dozen times the boat appeared exhausted, but she gained her passage spasmodically and heavily through the pit of the sea until the height of the waves hid her from sight. She was gone for three hours, at the end of which the rain began to fall once more,

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and nothing could be distinguished upon the sea but the lordly and menacing line of breakers on the pebbles, nor was any sound heard above that booming save the clapping of the broken waves upon the jetty.

It was only when the boat was actually alongside the wharf and stout Hughie's great form pushed through the rain that those watching knew he had returned. He told his adventure in a few curt words, the rain pouring from him as though he had come out of the sea itself. They had made their way down the Sound, and when they had come to the Deeps they were crying aloud. No boat could live in the Sound when the Deeps cried out in that manner, and it was impossible to know whether the *Sealight* had been seen in those waters during the night. They had turned and rowed back without making the land at any point.

"She'll come to-morrow," said stout Hughie as he strode off to his cottage, his little son leaping like a partridge by his side.

In the night the storm drew away from the island, and when the men got up in the morn-

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ing the sea lay like a flood upon low-lying meadows, ebbing and flowing without any visible motion. A ghostly fog covered the island and hid the Sound. In the afternoon the sun came out, lighting up the mist on every side but not dissipating it. The boats anchored in the cove were like shadow-pictures in the opaque whiteness. Through the long idle day stout Hughie and his men waited for the *Sealight* which never came to take away the mountain of herring lying up on the shore.

Day followed day of tranquil tide, of silver mist, and ghostly sun. At the close of each day stout Hughie said to the men, "She's due to-morrow without fail," and they answered, "Aye, she never missed so long as this before"; but the *Sealight* never came near the island, and the sun was shining every day upon the herring lying up on the shore. On the fourth day Hughie's wife went from house to house speaking to the women, who thereupon brought all the salt they had to the shore, and poured it into a barrel beside the herring. But when they looked at the salt and then at the mountain of herring, they were silent, and turned to

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look anxiously over that halcyon sea for the first trickle of smoke between the hills. There was not salt enough in the island to preserve one barrel of herring, and here were twenty. Then the little company sat down to wait. The fishing was almost over for this year, and the earnings of the fishermen had been poorer than usual. Stout Hughie turned over his nets. They were torn in many places, and it was only three weeks before that a net belonging to the other boat had been washed overboard in a great storm that had overtaken them. Hughie's wife, looking at the herring, fancied that the heap had shrunk in bulk, but she said nothing, only sat and waited for a sign of the herring-steamer.

In the evening stout Hughie and the fishers once more put out the boats on that paven sea spreading on all sides of the tiny island, and rowed down the Sound. This time they passed the Deeps and gained the open sea, waiting through the night until dawn should bring the *Sealight* to her accustomed market-place. But the night passed without any sound upon the silence save the wind blowing over the face of

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the water, and no light but the scintillating of the herring passing near them with the tide. When the morning was high with a clear sun they rowed back. Hughie's wife met them on the jetty.

"There'll be no good going after her again, Hughie," she said. Stout Hughie turned sharply round. "The herrin's gone bad," she said. Hughie strode over to the silver heap and turned the herring with his foot while the men watched him. He came back in silence with a moody face. The old man whose menace had been disregarded came after him as he looked sullenly at his mates.

"Ye'll put out the boats and give back the herring ye took, stout Hughie," he said.

"Aye, they're good for nothing," returned Hughie.

"Bury them where ye took them," said the old man.

"I'll do that," answered Hughie humbly.

At nightfall, at the usual hour for setting out, the fishing-boats were brought alongside for the first time since the catch was taken. Men, women, and children worked steadily and

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soberly, carrying the still shining but loathsome herring to the boats. They sank low in the water beneath the burden. When the last creel was emptied into the boats, the men took out the oars, for there was no wind to help them, and rowed the weight of herring down the Sound. Beyond the Deeps they rested, and stout Hughie stood up on the bow of his boat and looked at the hills of the mainland coming back out of the mist.

“Here’s the place we got them,” he said, as he took a handful of the herring and threw them into the sea. The men filled their baskets with the fish and cast them to their tyrant, and the herring turned over and over as they sank like a silver shower running into the sea. When the last of the catch had been buried and the boats were clear, stout Hughie gazed over the expanse of water and repeated in a relieved tone—

“It was there we took them.”

“Aye, it was there,” echoed the men, unshipping the oars and rowing soberly back up the Sound.

HEAVY-LADEN

VII

HEAVY-LADEN

FOUR of us were sitting in a room in an English house, when one of us—I think it was our host's sister—quoted a saying, "The only pathos in life is the human animal." Where did I last hear that, and who quoted it to me? I was convinced that the occasion had been memorable, yet I could not recall it. All at once I remembered. I raised my eyes and looked across at John Selwyn, who, watching my face, forestalled me.

"If I remember rightly, that was a saying beloved of Fosse Hewitt," he said.

"Ah, that's it," I acquiesced; but here our host's pretty sister broke in, "And who was Fosse Hewitt?" John Selwyn leaned back in his chair and looked at her. The same thought, I should say, struck both of us at that moment.

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The quiet room inside the drawn curtains, the pretty girl sitting in the lamplight, were so far removed from the world in which we had known Fosse Hewitt—"mad Fosse" we used to call him. It seemed like a violence done in that subdued and decorous room to drag into it the recollection of our harebrained reformer. I had been in Japan for many years, and on my return had been asked to meet John Selwyn, a student of my day, a good fellow, but fundamentally hard I had always imagined. He had grown amazingly prosperous. After a moment's silence he answered the lady's question.

"Fosse Hewitt dates back to our student days. He was a law-student whom we knew rather well. In those days we had to 'cultivate our thinking on a little oatmeal' with a vengeance, so Shaw there, Fosse Hewitt, and I shared rooms between us. I suppose we were of the usual student type. Shaw and myself you see in our developed condition. Poor Fosse never did develop. He was a tall, lanky man, with too small a head on the top of his broad shoulders. He shaved clean, and

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this, with his little round face and eager expression, made him appear a trifle ridiculous, as if some conjurer had transposed a boy's head on to a man's body. Great loose arms he had, I remember, and he strode along the street as though he was measuring the ground at every step. At other times his feet were always in each other's way, and he would trip himself up in the most unlikely places. Of course, he had lots of habits that we all mimicked. He had a way of bending his head and saying, 'You think so? Just so!' which the whole college knew. Poor old Fosse! He seemed, by some difficulty in his nature, to have been made for the very opposite of all he intended to be. He had chosen to be a law-student, and I never saw anyone act so entirely and consistently on his impulses. He was to study criminal law, and he would maintain for hours upon end that the criminal is the injured person. 'A civilisation which allows a class to grow up in such a condition isn't fit to exist,' he would say. This was rather before the modern movements were under way. He was the most charitable fellow alive, and the

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most enthusiastic. He would have made an ideal foreign missionary, yet he was to spend his days in the law courts. Oddly enough, though he skipped all the lectures he could, he had a genuine enthusiasm for his profession. He was the sort of fellow who couldn't follow anything in cold blood. He spent days, when he ought to have been at his classes, in wandering about the low districts of the city and picking up acquaintance with their floating and unclean population. As I said, these were the days before much sentiment about the poorer classes was abroad, and we all thought Fosse a little crack-brained. Crack-brained we all were for the matter of that. I remember how we used to sit half through the night discoursing off the book—the only dissipation allowed to poor students, Miss Mary. Fosse was the only one of us who knew much about any other life than our own, which was the secret of his influence over us, I suppose. With his great arms waving like the sails of a windmill, he would harangue us far into the night, blundering out his sentences without either sequence or coherence. That

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was another contradictory thing about him. In speaking he could hardly put two sentences together. On rare occasions, though, he had impassioned eloquence enough, and then his words would all come at once, in a torrent which carried everyone with it. At such times we would swear to anything he did, and were ready to join the Legation against the Powers if he'd asked us to.

"He was one of those idealistic fellows who credit everyone else with their own sensibilities. To my thinking it's a mistake. Instead of taking the poor man as he is, and working from that, Fosse attributed feelings to him which your labourer couldn't even guess at. 'The poor man doesn't know what he wants,' he would say; 'show him, and he'll want it fast enough!'

"'Oh yes he does,' I would say; 'give the poor man a chance of getting what he wants, and the first things he'll ask for are cheaper beer and more money for his scamped work. He'll want education in snippets without the trouble of learning. Your poor man is a lazy animal, Fosse!'

"He would always rise to a bait like that.

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At first he would sit gasping. Then he would spring up and begin to pace the room.

“‘No, really, Selwyn. . . . I can’t tell . . . I really don’t know what to say. . . . You’re such a good, generous fellow, you can’t think so yourself. . . . You’re a far better fellow than you make yourself out to be. . . . Oh, you can’t! . . . You have as much sympathy with the poor as I have, but you like to hide it. . . . That’s what it is . . . you think just as I do really, but your emotions don’t lie on the surface as mine do.’

“That was what characterised him most. He never would take you at your own estimate. Some people resented this. They always thought he was laughing at them, and his beloved poor most of all. It was the most pathetic sight and the most ludicrous, too, to watch Fosse talking to a man who begged from him. There he would stand, his little, eager face working, explaining as tenderly as a man explains a piece of machinery to his sweetheart, what a fine fellow he—the beggar—was, and how pleased Fosse felt to be able to relieve him, and there the beggar would be,

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growing every moment more suspicious of a trap, but responding, 'Yes, sir, oh yes, sir!' and holding out for the money at the end, making off with it, too, as fast as he could when he'd got it! His great theory was that the poor are unloved. Though he would talk readily enough of better conditions, better houses and wages, and so on, he always came back to this, that the only thing the poorer class really need is spontaneous love from the higher.

"'The poor man,' he would say, 'has repellent manners and speech. His thoughts are untrained and his passions uncontrolled, but he is rich in his affections. Yet there is nothing the poor have to stint themselves in more than in the natural affections. If it's a choice between a generous affection and your own existence, it's easy to say which will win. That's why so many old people have to go to the workhouse. And we? We see that the poor man is a problem. We see even that he might be dangerous. We talk of throwing sops to him in the form of house room and land. As if he doesn't know that he's as

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much right to these things as we have! He knows it, I tell you, and he'll not thank you for giving him what you'd no right to arrogate to yourself in the first place. What he does need and would take gladly, I believe, is understanding, and, above all, love. He's ignoble because he doesn't get them, and he'll remain so until you give them to him.' Sometimes, if he found us serious enough, he would add, for he was sincerely religious, I believe, 'It is the way, you know, in which Christ accomplished *our* redemption.' But I'm afraid we didn't often encourage him along that line. However, he began to show the poor men that he loved them. Sometimes they would laugh at him, and sometimes edge away in alarm. Poor Fosse!

"One day, in the height of the dog-days, Shaw and I were sitting in our dingy room in our shirt-sleeves. Even in that dusty, cheap little room it was cooler than out of doors. Suddenly Fosse came in like a hurricane. He seated himself in the creaky armchair, set his elbows on either arm, joined the tips of his fingers, and sat looking at us without saying

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a word. We watched him languidly. Presently he sat up, drew his legs in, and began to talk quietly and coherently.

“‘I’d like to tell you two men about something,’ he said. ‘I’ve seen such unhappiness, such unhappiness! There’s an old man, a very poor old man, whom I’ve been watching for a long time. I saw him first coming out of the cellar of a bakehouse. He looked so forlorn and homeless that I couldn’t help following him, but he turned round and saw me. Afterwards I saw him again, and then more frequently, until at last I passed him every day. He was always alone, and he used to walk along with his eyes on the ground and his hands behind him. He reminded me of an old vagrant leaving the workhouse door. There was a bitter east wind blowing and the street was wet. He looked up and down. No one knew him or welcomed him. It was no one’s concern which way he went. He shivered, turned up his coat-collar, and wandered on in those streets which, claiming him, offered him no home, and disowning him, fascinated and drew him to them. He

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was always alone, slinking along near the wall of the houses as if afraid to be noticed, and his sad, faded eyes looked furtively and hurriedly at the passers-by. When I first saw the man, I felt ashamed. I couldn't look at him, so abject, so broken. Then I felt angry—I think I have it in me to hate the unfortunate—but always I felt guilty, as though some weak creature that I had tried to kill had not had its death-stroke, but dogged me, showing its wounds. What could have crushed a man like that? There were some things apparent. There was age upon him, and labour, and that fatal inability to help himself which the poorer class have for an inheritance. Neglect and poverty and weakness were evident enough, but there was more behind. I've found out to-day what it is.

“ ‘He's a journeyman-baker to begin with, and everybody knows what that means—unearthly hours, steaming heat, sickening damp underground cellars to work in, then suddenly the cold, early-morning air! But I've found out more to-day. He has a wife and son. The wife is a drunken fury who married him,

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one might think, because she thought she could bully him. But she can't, any more than a mass of dough. Still, she keeps him poor. Then there's the son, the only one, and that's the trouble. The old man set his heart on this lad, but he got into bad company, and for some time he's been watched by the police. The old man follows him about whenever he's off work. At first he used to try to get him away from the gang, but the men jeered so at the appearance of his odd figure that the boy was furious, and one day turned on his father. Since then he follows him secretly, never showing himself, sneaking behind corners, living in fear of his being caught, and still more in dread of his son's discovering that he tracks him. I found it all out to-day. I was walking in that part of the town when there suddenly struck behind me the beat of a drum. Everybody stopped as if at a signal and turned to look at a jerking, advancing, oblong mass of soldiers just wheeling into the street on their way to the barracks. All occupations were suspended as the soldiers filed past, each line of them moving exactly like the

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preceding one. Half the people in the street began to march along with the column, staring at the men as though they were wild beasts. The rest of the crowd were all turning away in different directions, when, as so often happens, a second diversion brought them together again. Right into the crowd, apparently by mistake, there rushed a lanky red-headed youth with the policeman close at his heels. The crowd divided, with that instinct to cover the pursued which no amount of civilisation can suppress, but the boy lost his head at the sight of the people. He tried to turn, saw the officer, then rushed headlong up an alley close behind me. The people closed in, and I was forced up first into the courtyard at its end. It seemed already swarming with people, pressing round the policeman, who had the boy by the collar, and was going through all his motions like a machine. The boy, standing with his feet tightly together, hindered the search as much as he could. It was abominable to be standing there. I turned to get out, but at that moment the crowd gave back. The officer had got what he wanted, and was de-

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liberately and irresistibly pushing the boy before him, using him as a ram against the crowd. He hadn't taken two steps before my old man ran out of the house in the corner of the court. Heaven knows what fear was aroused in him by the noise in the yard. He had on neither hat nor coat. As soon as he saw what had happened the effect was so strange. He stood stock still with a foolish smile upon his face. It might have seemed as though he was relieved that an end of some kind had come to his stealthy days. Then he got up to the boy in some way, and held on to his arm, uttering a confused and broken whimper. "Oh, lad. Oh, lad. . . . Jack, lad . . . Jack, I'm fond of you . . . I am lad . . . I'm fond of you . . . I'll come along of you . . . I'm not going back on you . . . as long as I can stand on my old legs." The policeman stood stolidly looking over the crowd. The man whose watch had been stolen appeared on its edge. The officer beckoned to him, a rather needy clerk. He gave the boy in charge. The policeman nodded cheerfully, and once more began pushing the boy in front of him, walking rather

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quickly. He forced the old man off and went away so fast that the old fellow had to run to keep up with him. The last thing I saw of him was his bent back as he ran haltingly after the disappearing capture. Even then he looked as though he were running away from someone—Jack, I'm fond of you!' broke off Fosse in a dejected voice.

"We were new enough to dismal tales like that then to feel the weight of them, and we both sat dumb, looking helplessly at Fosse. In a few minutes this became unbearable. 'What do you propose to do?' I asked awkwardly. Fosse didn't speak for a long time. Then he said—how like him it was, and how he and we absolutely believed it!—'I should like to take him out of his life for a day, to show him that there's free air and earth still in the world, to let him loose from the things that chain him to his wretched existence. It's no use giving him money. His wife will find it out and drink it. Let's give him a day's excursion.' We talked it over. We were all to take a free day, the following Thursday. Fosse was to

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see the old man and arrange a meeting-place for us all.

“On Thursday morning we crossed the town to this little-visited district. What a desolate place! As far as one could see, the land had been laid waste by labour; as if a giant gone mad had set out in anger to ruin a city. There is a labour that is august and ancient. This labour was grim, gigantic, and compelling. All round the flat brick wastes rose up the factory stalks, fit forest for such a soil. Every feature, as if in malicious mimicry, took on some semblance to the good creation, as if the earth, labouring under a curse, had brought forth for trees those blasted stalks, for rivers those stained pools, and for hills those wilderness heaps of ashes. The canal, dull and livid as old armour, wound through the dismal streets. The sky, charged with smoke, sank lower and lower upon the housetops. On the other side of the town we had left a fair clean morning. Here the air was heavy and sullen as a thunder-cloud.

“The old man, Roger Hone his name was, stood waiting for us. He was exactly as Fosse

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had said, tall and bent and faded through long working in steaming heat. His face had the baker's whiteness, and was marked all over with loose lines such as appear on the surface of dough. His white beard grew thick and soft and all in one place under his chin. As soon as I saw him I understood what Fosse had felt. He looked at us unquestioningly, patiently, understanding nothing. I once watched a man who was going insane. As his faculties loosened he struggled hard to retain something that he felt was slipping from him. He went more and more among his neighbours, and his eager fretted face seemed to be continually inquiring what it was that he missed. But all the time cracks spread over the surface of his talk, and he became incoherent. Presently people avoided him, and he became silent. He no longer sought intercourse with his neighbours. In silence he paced the streets, thinking, one would say, thinking deeply. Only from time to time one would be alarmed to find his eyes fixed on one's face with the same inquiry, but wilder, more urgent. 'What is the difference?' As

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time went on I heard of his seizing people. Their fear of him irritated him. In the end he became entirely silent, refusing to speak, angry if any voice forced its way into the dark chamber of his thought, or if any obstacle interrupted his daily monotonous pacing to and fro. Old Roger Hone reminded me of this man. It seemed like dragging a sick person into too strong a light to bring him out of doors. His aloofness, the barrier that his uncomprehending look raised between him and us, made me feel like a brute for breaking in upon him. If I had been alone I should have given him money and sent him back, but Fosse had already reached him, running in front of us with great bounds, as though he would run the old man down. Hone was dressed in his working-clothes, riddled with flour dust, and he held his dusty cap in his hand. Fosse danced up and down, and shook his hand several times. 'Well, you're here waiting for us,' he said, 'so we can start at once.'

"The old man was visibly embarrassed. He flushed a faint red, put on his cap, bending

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his head to meet his hand like a child, and set off obediently with Fosse, walking with his hands behind his back, with his long flat feet shuffling and flapping the pavement. Fosse, walking with him, seemed to take one stride forward and half a stride back to every step of the old man's. He hung over him, talking, laughing, listening tenderly to every hesitating sound from him, but nothing could dispel old Hone's embarrassment. All through the journey it was the same. Fosse talked hard, telling stories, pointing out places as we passed, doing his utmost to cajole the old man's interest, and the poor old fellow sat with a feeble smile on his face, glancing furtively alongside at his companion, like a young servant girl who is travelling for the first time under the eye of her mistress.

"In twenty minutes we had reached our destination, within walking distance of that grimy district, yet as remote and unsullied as if in the heart of Africa. For a short time I forgot why we had come there. Here was the purple patch sure enough! Passing through the village, we had come unawares upon a

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road between mountains, lifting their sides in an air so luminous and still that the grey stones on their summit were as distinct as those at our feet, yet making a cleft so deep that the valley beneath was dark and mysterious and cool as a sea-cave. The sky was cloudless and of a heavy blue. We were enclosed in this cup, into which the sun was pouring heat in a steady stream, refining the purged air and uncovering the limit of the hills. Straight from the town we had fallen upon this ancient life, unwearied and strong and permanent. It had no need of us, no place for us. We were accidents in the presence of those enduring forms. All round us the silence was so deep that it seemed as though every moment would be the last, and that the hills would suddenly awake from that heavy and quiet sleep. Leaving the road, we wandered upon a heathery slope. Below us a little river twisted and shone in the grass. I heard Fosse telling old Hone that we had brought him here to forget his work for a day, and to enjoy the quiet and beautiful world. The old man still smiled his foolish smile, and

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looked helplessly round. Presently he looked at Fosse, who had fallen to silence, and who, looking at the prospect, did not observe his companion. Then he put out his knobbed hand and touched his arm. 'Master,' he said. Fosse started. 'Master,' he repeated, 'it's a very quiet place this.' Fosse looked at him kindly, and nodded, but said nothing.

"'If I was to go up theer,' went on the old man, absorbed in his idea, 'a little further off so as I shouldn't disturb the gentlemen, I think I could get a sleep. It's a very quiet place.'

"'Yes, yes,' said Fosse, without looking at him. 'I brought you here to do just as you'd like best.'

"'Yes, I think I could get a sleep in a place like this,' said the old man again. He got up heavily and climbed further up the hill. Fosse helped him. He lay down painfully, putting his cap under his head, and in a little while we could hear him snoring gently. All through the afternoon we sat there, but still he slept on. Occasionally we got up to look at him, but he lay in a deep sleep, his mouth open and snoring gently, one hand grasping the wrist of the

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other, his trousers stretched up above his broken boots. As it grew late in the day and the last train was due, we tried to wake him. We shouted at him; at last we had to shake him and drag him to his feet. He was furious with us. He shook his fist at us angrily and then began to cry. He sat there on the heather, whimpering helplessly. Fosse took his hand and stroked it, and before long we got him on the road again. The cool air aroused him, and he became once more the docile broken old baker we had brought with us. We took him back to the town, and it was after we had silently watched him disappear into the hovel which he called his home, that Fosse turned to us and said, 'The only pathos in life is the human animal.' "

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VIII

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“**Y**OU were just remarking,” said the Doctor, raising his voice and looking at the three friends seated with him in his library after dinner, “on the exceptional character of the life in a large seaport city like this, and wondering whether the customs of the poorer classes are affected to any appreciable extent by the speech or manners of the foreign sailors who are continually among them. I myself incline to think that such influence is not so formidable as might be supposed, but incredible things happen at times in the obscure parts of our maritime cities. I can tell you a story which came under my own observation not so very long ago. You know that for some years I was house-surgeon in the S—— hospital? Well,

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to-day I have been looking at the alterations they are making between that institution and the Duke's Dock, and I see that among the buildings which are being dismantled there is an old lodging-house called the 'Rover's Return,' in which a strange incident occurred during my stay in that part of the town.

"This house, which, on account of its situation near the dock gates, was frequented solely by seafaring men and emigrants of the poorest type, was kept for many years by an old woman, then sixty-five years of age—a good-humoured, contented soul, who could neither read nor write, and who had never in her life set foot beyond her native town. Whether the stories which filtered to her through her sea-going clients from all quarters of the globe had been too much for her, I cannot say; but she was known to have a strong prejudice against those strange and wicked lands beyond the sea, and had been often heard to declare, when anyone spoke in her hearing of foreign people, that 'Thank heaven she knowed nothing of them!' and 'Please God she'd live and die in a Christian country!' She was a

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favourite in the district, since she was chatty, good-natured, and in no way held herself to be better than her neighbours, and had besides, what I have often noticed in illiterate people, an extraordinarily tenacious memory for all the family histories and interests of the district, nor was she above talking of them.

“Her husband was a morose old Scot, once, I believe, a weaver, but at that time earning ten shillings a week as a night watchman in the streets. Wrinkled like seaweed, with a mouth so contracted that his nose and chin almost met, and with an inscrutable expression of the eyes, this man, who scarcely ever spoke, had been in his youth a strong Radical, a member of several societies for the destruction of society, and actually at the time of his marriage labouring to save the required sum for admission to some Utopian colony in America whose chief law was to be community of goods. But he had met his fate and married, and nothing further was heard of this land of promise. The ten pounds which he had scraped together for this project remained in the savings-bank, a provision for old age.

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This strangely-mated couple had one son, a hunchbacked cobbler who had hard work to live, and who cherished a secret dislike towards his father.

“The old man was, I should think, the most silent person under heaven ; but certainly, for a man who said so little, he appeared to have a good deal confided to him. The box, like a coffin planted on end, in which he sat out the night behind his brazier of glowing coals, so attractive a sight in the cold, dark street, seemed to be a meeting-place for wanderers and odd fish of all kinds. Out of the darkness of the overhanging storages these night-birds would appear, singly, in twos and threes, sometimes in whole companies, attracted like moths to the irresistible centre of light and warmth. Watching this circle of haggard faces under the impish freaks of the firelight, one might have thought that this gathering in the midst of heaped timber and road-wreckage had the appearance of a conspiracy, as if some dark understanding drew these aliens together.

“As might be supposed, the queerest wanderers afloat came to lodge in that part of the

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town, mariners who appeared at night from one end of the globe and set out in the morning for the other; and on an afternoon in winter two men came to the 'Rover's Return,' one the captain of a small sailing-vessel, surly and red-eyed and full of oaths, and with him his only passenger, a lean, bilious-looking man of no settled occupation. The old woman, Isabel Ferguson, took a sudden and violent dislike to this lodger, for no apparent reason, seeing that he paid regularly and gave no trouble. But she called him a spy, and, as was remembered afterwards, she had been heard to say, 'When that man comes in, it's time for me to go out.'

"The captain, for his part, had settled with himself that it was a point of honour in him to escort his passenger round the sights of the port. Every day, therefore, while the vessel remained in dock, he and his friend would set out to see the sights, and since these, to the sailor, meant chiefly the red lamps of the taverns, their journey would always end in one of the innumerable places which make it their business to entertain those engaged in or

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attached to maritime pursuits. Once settled in one of these places the captain would refuse to stir; and there he would sit so long as he had money in his pocket, burning himself up with rum, and calling on the crowd who came and went between the swinging doors to live merrily and earn the rewards of paradise by treating an honest seafaring gentleman newly arrived from 'Frisco.

“Then his companion, freed from this old man of the sea, would wander about the port, finding his way always, however, at nightfall to the place where old David Ferguson watched by his fire. Seated on a pile of timber, he would observe the downcast faces of his companions, and with commiseration for their ill-luck and misfortune, would talk much of America and of freedom, of unequal and burdensome marriage-laws, of the shackles of Englishmen, of freedom again and always of America and once more America, until the circle of outcasts, who had nothing to gain or lose if an empire fell, would sit half through the night in pity for themselves and their mismanaged country. Happening to pass one night, and

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observing the close interest of the men, I stayed for a minute to listen. The speaker was describing some ideal State which existed in America, but not until he named the State did it occur to me what the man was after. 'In Utah,' said the stranger. 'Why! the fellow's a Mormon,' I said to myself; and just then old Ferguson, who had been leaning out of his shed, his eyes fixed on the fire, his mouth so contracted that it seemed to have disappeared altogether, his attitude expressing the closest attention, bent down to reach coal for his fire, at the same time asking some question of the Mormon which I did not hear.

" 'As old as he likes,' replied the man. As I came away an old man left the circle and joined me.

" 'He's got a deal to say for himself that theer,' he observed.

" 'It's none of it worth much?' I asked.

" 'Eh, I don't know. I pay no attention to him. I just sits me down and warms myself as always, and then I comes away and leaves him to his talking. But he's plenty to say.' I laughed and bade the old man a good-night,

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and went on home, thinking no more of the matter.

“For nearly two months, it seems, the vessel remained in dock undergoing repairs, and at the end of that time the rum-loving captain and his friend disappeared and were never, to my knowledge, heard of again. Their place at the “Rover’s Return” was filled at once by other lodgers, and in a short time almost everyone had forgotten them.

“It was about a month later that the singular incident occurred which I am about to relate to you. Returning to my house one night I stood for a moment or two at the top of a street looking down upon the river, which, with its lights and signals, had the appearance of a vast illumination. Straight down the hill dipped the double row of street-lamps, displaying a whirligig of figures in the dark space between. In front of me, upon a blurred expanse which I knew for the opposite bank of the river, was a multitude of tiny twinkling stars, and stationary, or moving vaguely about in the darkness, like men searching with lanterns, were the red lights of passing steamers. On either side of the

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river long rows of lamps flung a steady gleam upon that liquid street; high above them swung the enormous lantern of the tower, and far down the great waterway the signal-light flashed against the sky, swiftly, mechanically, showing the entrance to ships in the channel. Here and there on the dim surface of the river, troubled blots of light were floating like lamps washed out to sea. Behind me, turning suddenly, I saw the moon, a great yellow moon, rising behind the chimneys and adding its share to the general illumination. It was as if the streets and the heavens were so many blazing ways lighting the wanderers of two worlds to the rim of that great divining-cup of the sea, in whose uncertain surface they might discern the phantom shapes and figures of futurity.

“Suddenly, as I turned to go down the hill, I became aware of two figures advancing towards me—an old woman, bareheaded and making a moaning sound as she walked, and with her, as it seemed a guard upon her, a small hunchbacked man. I recognised them as the landlady of the ‘Rover’s Return’ and her son, and as they came nearer I could hear

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that the moaning sound which came from the old woman was in reality the rapid utterance of words. Without seeming to see anything round her she cried: 'Let me go after my old lad, I tell you! I'll not stop here and him on the other side of the world. Oh, my poor old lad, I'll follow you—I'll find you somewhere—I'll come to the world's end after you!'

"Here the hunchback caught her by the arm and endeavoured to distract her attention. 'Come back home, mother,' he said. 'How can you find him in the wide world, you that never was out of this place in your life? You'll never find him on this side the grave. He's left you for good, and let him go—curse him!'

"'How can I go home?' returned the old woman, distracted for a moment. 'There's no home for me except where my old lad is—him going astray somewhere in the world, and perhaps on the sea this very night. There's people in the world that'll tell an old woman the road. Oh, my poor old lad, how could you do it to me? But I'll follow you, I'll follow you!'

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“ ‘Come out of the street, mother,’ repeated the son.

“ ‘It wasn’t well done by me,’ continued the old woman. ‘I’ve been a married woman for forty years, and I wish I was dead before I see this day.’

“ ‘And so do I,’ returned the son ; ‘but you must make up your mind to do without him. Come home now, mother, and let him go where he wants. You’ve got a son left.’

“ ‘It isn’t a husband,’ cried the old woman. ‘My poor old man, wherever have you gone to?’ And with that they turned into an alley, and I saw them no more.

“As I stood hesitating at the end of the street, which was one of eyeless warehouses, with lamps hung on the walls, and niches in which outcasts were lurking, two women came up the hill and stopped not far from me. ‘That’s what comes of a man that never opens his mouth,’ said one angrily. ‘I’d sooner have a man that knocks you about a bit than one of them that you never know what they’re thinking of. To leave his lawful wife, and them married forty years ! And she’s never shed a

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tear, nor she won't go home. She's wandering in the streets, saying she'll go after him and find him, and she a woman of sixty-five ! Oh, them wicked Mormons !'

"At that word, as if I had remembered some sin of my youth, the thought of the bilious stranger of the night-circle startled me, hit me with such a sense of catastrophe that I turned and spoke to the woman. 'What is the matter?' I asked ; 'what has happened?' Confused by my sudden questions, their story was incoherent and fantastic to a degree, but it amounted to this. Unknown to all, possibly even unsuspected by himself, some inexplicable and fatal tenacity of purpose had never ceased to exist in the brain of the old Scot. The passion, which seemed to have slept for forty years, had been by the chance visit of the Mormon missionary wrought to such a height that without a word he had gone his way, leaving home and wife at the age of seventy, taking with him the savings gathered so many years before, voyaging overseas to discover in that America of promise the fulfilment of his youthful dream.

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“For many days this incident haunted me, but there was a good deal of sickness that year, and through the pressure of other thoughts and much work, its outline had begun to fade, when, one day—a bright day with a blue sky—I went to the stage to see the American steamer sail. I amused myself for a time in the keen, alert atmosphere, watching that meeting-place of all nations. The tide was rushing with the speed of a mill-sluice, and the tiniest scrap of a sail was visible on that buoyant path. The huge vessel hove above the stage, bowing slowly with the action of the tide like a tethered horse impatient to start. In mid-channel the small river-steamers hurried panting about their business; a great liner with men at work in her rigging lay a dead-weight on the water; and a line of barges, uneasy with such a swell of water beneath them, were towed to their quiet dock by a screaming tug. On the stage itself I watched the crowd outside the barriers, the folk in a line on the deck of the vessel, the trim gloved officers, the porters coming and going along the gangway like figures in a child’s toy; then, turning on

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the roadway above the river, I saw the scene from a higher level, catching glimpses, across a deep pit of green water, of the crowd moving to and fro against the hull of the great steamer. A few seconds more, and I saw that the huge vessel had moved a step outwards and was cautiously feeling her way like a blind creature moving one step at a time. Then, with two tugs leading her in ropes, she went off slowly, the flail of her great propeller rising and beating the water, leaving behind her a writhing trail of foam. Presently, finding no check upon her but the two ropes, she stood still for a moment to rid herself of them, and then went away down the middle stream between a line of watching ships and people.

“As I withdrew my eyes from the beautiful creature, they were caught by a ludicrous figure not many yards from me. By my side, with his eyes fixed on the lessening steamer, standing on tiptoe so that his chin just appeared above the iron railing, and holding high above his head with both hands a two-foot rule with a spotted handkerchief fluttering from the end, was my friend the hunchbacked

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cobbler, with tears running down his face, unheeding everything but that black steerage-deck, on which it was impossible longer to distinguish a single figure. Then once again I remembered that belated emigrant, and understood, as certainly as if it had been told me, that somewhere in the heart of that great vessel which I had watched so carelessly was the forsaken old woman who had never set foot outside her native port, journeying on an impossible quest over strange and dreaded waters. I guessed how it had been. The neighbours, full of pity for her madness, and seeing that she could never rest, had gathered a sum of money, and allowed her to set forth on her hopeless journey. 'So that is the end of it,' I said to myself; and it was virtually the end, for though I was at some trouble to discover what became of the old couple, and whether they were ever united, no one in the town ever heard of them again. Nor did the son, whose poverty kept him behind, hear; and indeed, when I think of it, how should he, for his mother could not write, and his father had gone to join the Mormons."

THE QUIET LODGER

IX

THE QUIET LODGER

AN accustomed road which one travels for the last time becomes as unfamiliar as a strange one !

The time had come for me to leave M——, and bidding farewell to my friends, I had refused their company and set out alone across the dreary heath, on the edge of which I had lived for the past three years, into whose open bosom I had seen sun, frost, and rain alike penetrate, leaving it ever barren, impassive, and sombre. Whether it was the musing mood in which I walked, or the separation which I felt to have been already accomplished between myself and my past life in this place, so that I seemed to be revisiting a scene after the lapse of many years, I cannot say ; but as I walked, I fell into that unaccountable

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state in which one seems to be detached from any physical existence in the place through which one is moving. I seemed to have been withdrawn to a great distance from the scene which was actually before me, and to be looking upon it without passion or any part in it, yet tranquilly aware that somewhere or at some time it had had its part in the passion of my life ; and as I looked thus upon it, I could see, as one sees at times in a vivid dream, slight features which I had never observed in that landscape before, yet which now appeared in no way strange to me, but rather circumstances which I seemed to have been long awaiting, and now recognised rather than discovered.

The sky was sullen and the clouds were hanging in great sheets, wrapping in the light from above. There was no traveller on the heath beside me but a chill, silent wind, that streamed benumbing and lifeless across it. No sun had appeared from daybreak, yet now, straight before me, there dropped from that grey sky the red sun, neither shedding light nor, as it seemed, concerned with the wan heath below it, but glowing like a portent that

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had appeared for a moment from some world elsewhere ; and indeed, I never had so keen a sense of the unlikeness and distance of the celestial bodies from our earth as I had at the sudden and momentary apparition of that fiery splendour. For a moment or two it remained, then was received into the heavy bank of clouds beneath it, and once more the heath took on the resemblance to a country seen in a dream ; a country in which I had lost myself, yet was not afraid ; where I had been before ; whither I had come now, led by what Power I could not tell, for a purpose hidden from me.

So persistent was this mood that I found myself as I walked searching the path for some living figure, but though the tract was crossed by many on their way to and from the great coalpits on its farther side, this hour was mine alone. In a little while I had reached a depression in the heath, and now, from the rim of this cup, I could see two figures before me, one already climbing the path on the far side of the declivity, and the other, with whom there was a dog, standing in the hollow, with his face in my direction. Descending the

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hollow, the moor disappeared from my view. I could no longer see the melancholy plain over which I had taken my solitary journey. I could see only the grey, impenetrable dome above me and the circular rim of the cup within which were the only persons on the moor, swept together into this tiny hollow.

Both the strangers were old men. The man with his face in my direction, and with whom there was a dog, was small and withered, his eyes bleared and watery, and his feet unable to find the path. The dog was continually running from side to side of him, avoiding his staggering feet. I passed them unobserved, and in a few moments had overtaken the other man, who was toiling up the difficult moorland road. He was very old and tall, and seemed, by the basket upon his back and his long staff, to be of the old race of pedlars or of medicine-sellers. As he turned his head to reply to my greeting, his eyes appeared to be younger than the rest of his face; but I soon found that this was merely because of their colour, which was black in the setting of his white shrivelled skin. They were the eyes of an old man which no

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longer gazed outward, but searched inward for memories and past faces. He walked with the stride of those accustomed to travel many miles on foot. He must have been very old, but he kept pace with me and seemed disposed to talk. He spoke slowly, in a feeble voice, and in the manner of those unused to frequent speech, and I soon became as unconscious of his words, whilst still hearing his voice running on, as I was of the sound of the wind. At last I became conscious that he was asking me a question, that he had, in fact, asked me the same question twice.

"You'd meet a little way back," he said, "Job Sharlock and his quiet lodger?"

"I met an old man," I replied.

"An old man," echoed the medicine-seller; "yes, he'll be an old man. I've seen older; but he'll be an old man, getting on for seventy-six, I should say. He's lived here about twenty years. He'll be an old man by this time."

"You said something about a quiet lodger," I prompted.

"That's the dog," said the medicine-seller,

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turning his piercing eyes upon me. "You'll never have heard a dog called like that before, have you? It was Tim that gave it her. Tim was his son that left him, I should think it was six years ago."

He rambled on, and slowly, from the midst of his confused speech, I picked out this tale, of which I have forgotten the words, save that I know them to have been hesitating and palsy-shaken, uttered with difficulty, and interspersed with fragments of other tales; so that the story, slight and meagre in its details, lasted until, the wide heath crossed, we came out upon the first houses of the city on the other side. He then bade me farewell, the confidence prompted by the solitary place shrinking back at the sight of the city which makes all men strangers. But when I reached my destination, and once more felt the power of loneliness, I remembered the tale he told me, and wrote it down, the heath and the people upon it changed as seemed to me fitting, for the heath as I crossed it that day was no longer my familiar home, but a place of strange aspect that faded behind me as I advanced, a landscape which,

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gathering about the dejected figures of Job Sharlock and his quiet lodger, passed with them and is no longer to be sought in the world of substance.

It was six years ago, as the old medicine-seller had said, since Job and Tim Sharlock lived together in a cottage near the middle of the heath. Tim, the latest born of Job's scattered family, was a joiner, and Job himself had been a pavior. But since Tim had been old enough to work Job had been idle. He was a self-indulgent, weak old man, such character as he had possessed having fallen to pieces through excessive drinking. He now came and went and acted as his son bade him. Tim, now twenty-seven, of a hard nature, had grown up with the contempt of a disposition which never makes mistakes for one which does. Sober and taciturn of temper, his boyhood had been spent in the struggle for the mastery of his father. It was not long before he succeeded. After every outburst of anger between them, and as the drinking sapped the old man's resistance, his authority was slowly loosened. Tim became the one who directed. But his

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calculating and masterful nature had one grievance, that his father, docile to his will in everything else, was perpetually disobedient in the one matter of his weakness. So that between the two men there was always one cause of secret and steady resentment; but as people who live together cannot always be at the height of anger, after every disagreement they relapsed into the sullen and not wholly unamiable silence which sufficed for intercourse between them, each going his own way—Job, proud of his steady son, but unable to give up his weakness, and resenting Tim's violent dislike of it; Tim, morose and self-sufficing, seldom speaking to his father, yet grudging him nothing, and angry only when he saw signs of his indulgence.

No woman ever came near the cottage. Tim disliked those of his acquaintance, because he thought he saw in them those qualities of dependence which he saw and despised in his father. The furniture of the cottage was arranged so that the two men might have all the articles of use within immediate reach, and they divided the house-work between them.

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Job did the cooking, and served Tim every whit as well as a wife.

One day, as Job was preparing the midday dinner, Tim entered a few minutes before his usual time. He was dripping wet. He slung off his bag, shook his cap vigorously, and then brought from under his coat a shivering little terrier, with its hair plastered to its sides from long exposure to the rain which was beating on the heath. He put her down before the fire and stood near to watch the little creature, while Job looked curiously at her from the other side of the fire. For a few moments she stood trembling, and then, as the warmth began to reach her, she crept a little nearer to the fire and made a feeble effort to shake herself, followed by a stronger and more successful one. Presently she plucked up enough courage to place one wet paw on the fender, and then solemnly went through the only trick she knew, which was to flap her paw to each of the men in turn. A gesture which appeared so conscious and so appropriate as that of shaking hands with her hosts could not fail to amuse. The two men laughed. The little

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dog repeated the gesture, then curled down before the fire and closed her eyes.

"She means to stop here," exclaimed Job, laughing with the naïve enjoyment of an old man at the ways of a young creature.

"We've come to taking in a lodger at last," said Tim, getting up, with a chuckle. The little dog stayed, therefore, with the two men. She was neither very pretty nor very clever, but good-tempered and naïve, and she possessed the lightest heart of the three companions.

As an object which has once been laughed at by two people can never come into the presence of the two without recalling to both that momentary union of feeling, so the little dog, before whose naïve friendliness father and son had, at the same instant, broken from the suspicious reticence in which they habitually lived, became the cause of an indirect friendship between them ; and as amusement is more uniform in its action upon men than is grief, the two resentful natures became, while watching the pranks of the dog, almost united in feeling. The little creature, indeed, became

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like a child in the house. Tim hurried from work that he might have time to play with her, and she was Job's constant companion and playmate. These two were such good friends indeed that for six months Job had never given the head to his weakness.

From watching the tricks of the little dog in each other's company, the two men passed to speaking of her, and very gradually came to feel at ease in one another's presence, their common playmate an excuse for each to cover his embarrassment. The little dog had one peculiarity which Tim was the first to discover. She seldom barked or made any sound beyond a single muffled yelp. A man passing the cottage had one day raised the latch and entered the kitchen, while Tim was in an inner room. Coming back suddenly he was astonished to find his friend.

"Why didn't you let me know he'd come?" he asked, calling the dog. She wagged her tail inquiringly.

"Oh, you're not much use," he said; "you're too quiet a lodger!"

So the little dog became known as the quiet

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lodger, and Tim was wont to say that at last he had found a woman who would never annoy him with her tongue, and Job, that the quiet lodger never told tales.

One evening in summer the two men were sitting outside on the brown grass of the heath. In the clear air they could see the distant town, and beside them the quiet lodger was snapping lazily at the flies. They had gradually come to spend their evenings together in this way, the quiet lodger an apology for both. Under the softening influence of the evening, Job had begun to talk of his early years, of the time when his wife was still alive and Tim a little boy. Tim listened with a shame-faced smile to the description of his boyhood.

"When you was a little lad not much higher than a chair," his father was saying, "you'd stand both legs on the floor and shout out, 'You can't push me over, daddy!'" Tim gave a chuckle. "And I never did," went on Job; "for you'd set your little head down if I come near you and butt at my legs. A regular fighter! You've not done as much

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fighting in your life as you did when you was a little lad."

"I got it over young," said Tim, trying to hide his satisfaction in the description.

The quiet lodger, tired of her own devices, ran up at that point, and with the fearlessness of a child jumped on to Tim's knees. Tim took hold of her and pulled her ears, rolling her over and over, saying, "You're getting too fat, aren't you? Eh, aren't you? You don't get enough work to do, lady! I shall have to put you to work at *my* shop, and see how you'll like that! Will you come to work with me in the morning, eh?"

"You could take her with you and send her back when you got there," suggested Job.

"She'd not go back," said Tim, playing with her ears. "I'll tell you what," he added after a short pause; "you could come with me part way and bring her and then she could come back with you. She'll not come back alone."

"All right," answered Job. "It brings to my mind," he added, "when your mother was alive, and when she put you to bed you'd say,

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‘Wake me up to-morrow, mammy, when my daddy goes to work and I’ll go too.’ She’d hard enough work to get you up to go to school when to-morrow come. Well,” said the old man after a moment’s silence, “to-morrow’s come at last ; but it’s me going with you instead of the other way round.”

In the morning at five o’clock the two men left the cottage. It was going to be a hot day. The mist which waters the ground in summer-time had risen in the night and a heavy dew was spread on the short brown grass. The sunshine was welling forth exultingly, throbbing with its own excess of brightness. Soon the sun himself appeared, and his light seemed to leap onward from place to place until the whole world was alight. It was one of those mornings on which there is such rare serenity of the atmosphere that all stationary things appeared mirrored in the luminous air and the fabric of the solid earth seems woven of visionary stuff. The sunlight, suffusing itself through the morning haze, lay in a gleaming shaft upon the heath, like a broad lighted path to some singing world elsewhere, and runnels of liquid

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light flowed over the dew. The little dog rushed hither and thither, leaving a white track wherever she touched the hoary grass. Wet and happy she darted about the footsteps of the sunlight.

The father and son walked quickly, Tim a little in advance of Job because of the narrowness of the path. How curiously sometimes the same body is transmitted without the difference of a limb from father to son, and how tragic is the likeness when those two bodies of the same flesh are made to contain so different a spirit! At a little distance one could hardly have told which of these two men was the old and which the young, so exact a copy was Tim of his father. But Job knew the difference as he measured his vigour by his son's steady stride. As they came upon the first houses he stopped.

"I'll go back now," he said.

"All right! So long!" replied Tim, heaving his bag of tools on to the other shoulder. The quiet lodger, recalled from her own pursuits by this unexpected parting, held one foot in the air irresolute. Then she started in pur-

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suit of Tim. She was stopped by Job's whistle and came obediently, several times halting, however, and looking back as if puzzled by this summary separation.

Job returned slowly. The languor known to the old and the weakly and produced by the morning air began to creep over him. The sun, having driven the mist before it, began to cast its light in hot flames upon the heath. There was no shelter from it by the way they had come. Job turned aside into one of the innumerable paths that cross the heath. The heat increased, and Job hastened his steps. The sun smote on his head. The dust fatigued him, and filled his throat. He remembered that at the end of this road into which he had turned almost without willing it there was a tavern, a white cottage with a low slate roof, called the "Pedestrian's Tavern," a place so silent and lonely that there seemed something a little sinister in the air, as though only those who had reason to be secret in their doings could seek to frequent so hidden a hostelry. He came to this tavern and looked back over

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the blazing heath above which the heat seemed to quiver like the air over a cauldron, and as the sweet smell of the beer reached him he entered the flagged passage of the inn. The cool stone entrance was an instant relief from that glare outside. Job sat on the bench and called for beer. He drank it gleefully, losing remembrance of everything but the pleasure of that cool liquor gliding over his tongue. He sat on for a long time. Presently he began to be angry with the woman for loitering when she refilled his glass. Each one she brought him he drank with greater eagerness, and his thirst increased. Soon she came to him and said, "How much money have you got in your pocket?" Job stood up with difficulty and shook his pocket out over the table. The woman took what was required for the reckoning. There was only one halfpenny left. "You can't have any more now," she said, "you must go home."

"I'll come back with some more money," said Job, going out of the door heavily and uncertainly. The quiet lodger, lying in the sun,

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got up and came dispiritedly after him. Job grew confused in the light and air. It was as if his head had been emptied of all knowledge of what now concerned him, but as one finds unexpectedly a thing one had lost long ago, he remembered that he had seen Tim put his club-money into a box on the top shelf of the cupboard. He stumbled on, his one thought being to get this money and return to the tavern before Tim came back.

The sun's heat was terrible. The clouds had all fled before it. The factory chimneys on the edge of the town stood erect and spectral, each with its lash of smoke uncurled, like the taskmaster's whip above the labouring horde beneath. The sun, almost vertical now, was scorching the grass, and there was a steady burning of the whole air. It seemed to beat upon the old man's head with malicious determination. He walked very heavily with his head bent down. The road across the heath had grown immeasurably longer. When he reached the cottage he had no strength to return and drowsiness was overcoming his desire. He was on the point of falling asleep

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on a chair when a sudden thought startled him awake. He was forgetting the money by which alone he could satisfy the thirst which he knew would stay with him for days. He steadied himself and crossed the room. Groping for the box, he found it and took it down. As he turned to make his way to the table he found himself face to face with Tim, who had come in without any noise and who now stood silently watching him with a darkening face. The quiet lodger was between them. The two men so like each other stood staring at one another for a moment in blank silence. Tim was making up his mind for some question, he could not tell what. But suddenly Job, into whose befogged brain there penetrated the thought that he was too late, that with the entrance of Tim his opportunity was gone, fell into one of those senseless rages which overcome drunken men. Brandishing the box over his head, he shouted at Tim—

“Go out of my house, do you hear! I’ll be master in my own house. Never come back to it. You’re only my son! I’m master here! You want to spy on me, do you? Go out, you

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have no right here. I shall do what I want in my own house. I'm master, I tell you. Why don't you go? Go out, I tell you!"

All Tim's resentment rushed up in a flood. Coming a step nearer he looked steadily at his father and said: "Say it again and I'll go! You can give me the money you was going to steal first. But trust me to go if you say that again. Only if I go you'll never see my face again. Say it now if you dare!"

"I'll say it! I'll say it!" shouted Job, rushing on his son with the box upraised. "Go out! Go out!"

Tim escaped the blow and walked off without a word, but as he went he whistled for the dog. She followed him, and the two disappeared together.

As soon as they had gone Job forgot all about them. He forgot that he had wanted money or drink. His violence had exhausted his strength, and he fell asleep on the floor. No one came to disturb him, and he slept like a log until evening. He awoke stiff and weary, but without any remembrance of what had happened. He looked round for the quiet

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lodger, but did not see her. Then noticing that Tim was not in concluded that he had taken her for a walk. Seeing that it was growing dark he went to bed. In the morning he began as usual to prepare breakfast. Tim did not come down. Going upstairs he found his room empty. He began to grow uneasy. He examined the door. It had remained unlocked as he had left it the night before. Tim had, therefore, not been in all night. The quiet lodger was not there either. What had become of them? He stayed indoors till dinner-time. Tim did not return. The old man set out for Tim's workshop. He had not been seen that day. Job returned home. The house was still empty. He found a piece of money on the floor which had fallen from the box as he had shaken it, but it brought no recollection to him. Yesterday was a blank.

After the lapse of a day Job heard a scraping at the door towards evening. He listened. It was repeated. Stumbling to the door he opened it. There was no one there, but something living brushed against his legs. It was the dog returned to him. Job caught hold of

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her collar and said, "Where's Tim? Is he coming?" The dog twisted her head and whined under his grip. Then he got angry and shook her. "Tell me!" he shouted; "what's he done with himself? Where's he gone?" But the quiet lodger could not answer save by her eyes which she turned sadly on her solitary master, in the meantime licking his hand. Tim never came back, but "every once in a while," as the old medicine-seller said, money came to Job through the post. "It's always the same amount and it all goes the same way," said the medicine-seller.

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GRANNY KINSEY was the greatest gossip in the country-side, and since she attended all the houses of birth or death in the neighbourhood in a professional capacity, she was well able to express her opinions on the behaviour of her neighbours. She was a very tall and stout woman, with eyes almost buried in her huge cheeks, and an agility quite remarkable in a woman of her size. She was of a generous and easy-going disposition, and had that freedom from rancour often to be seen in those whose minds and hands are fully occupied with matters of the first importance. She was an authority, too, on all the mysterious customs of the country people. She knew, for instance, at what hour of the day one might carry an egg into the house without ill-luck following ;

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what was signified by a cat's crossing the hearth at midday ; how if an egg was found lying in the road someone was certain to be struck by lightning on that spot ; nor did she neglect, when a death occurred in the house, to hurry outside and whisper the news to the bees. She had only two aversions, a drunkard and a dirty hearthstone, and it had been a secret mortification to her for many years that the best apples in her garden were known in the country-side as Maltsters, until, under the promptings of Onion Alice, she hit upon the device of re-christening her apples by the unimpeachable name of Good Templars, when her tree became her proudest possession.

Granny Kinsey had neither chick nor child belonging to her, and that was why, as she grew on in years and was lonely, she took in a female lodger who went by the name of Onion Alice.

Onion Alice came to live in the country from the town of Manchester. She belonged to that class of society which has long ago lapsed from the condition in which baptismal names are bestowed, and returned to that state

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of life in which names are given because of some characteristic blemish or idiosyncrasy. She was a hawker of Spanish onions, which she carried about the villages in long strings slung over her arm like garlands of flowers. She was a meagre weather-beaten woman who went lame of one foot, and who, to the infinite impatience of Granny Kinsey, received visits from time to time from a drunken, good-for-nothing smith who was her husband. Onion Alice, though not communicative of her own accord, did not resent questions, and it was possible to get from her as much of her history as one cared to know. Her husband, whom, ~~by~~ a licence of speech, she invariably called "my good husband," having left her some years before, she had taken to selling onions for a livelihood, the idea having suggested itself to her when she remembered that her "good husband" had been fond of a Spanish onion sliced in vinegar for his supper. At intervals this vagabond returned to her for money, which she always let him have, if she possessed any, in a very philosophic manner. Some people, and especially Granny Kinsey,

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who had no patience with drunkards, were exasperated by what appeared to them—the blind infatuation of Onion Alice. Once, after a visit from this man, Granny Kinsey's annoyance rose to such a pitch that in angry soliloquy she exclaimed—

"I wonder why ever the Lord lets him live so long!"

Onion Alice, for whose benefit this was said, made no pretence of ignoring the remark, but, letting her rustling strings of onions fall to the ground, said meditatively, as though it was a question that had often presented itself to her mind—

"I suppose He has an idea that he'll repent, but *I know better!*"

The discrimination of this answer entirely appeased Granny Kinsey.

Onion Alice's lameness was to be attributed also to her good husband, who disapproved of doctors and who refused to allow her to see one when her foot became a trouble to her. Onion Alice, whose foot pained her, was inclined to rebel at this, had not her good husband recalled to her memory a "text" in

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the marriage-service, which commanded her obedience to him. Onion Alice's memory asserted, but in the submission she added the saving clause, "I'll do it till you're dead, but catch me after." Upon her husband's desertion she had taken for granted that the term of obedience might now be accounted over, and had, of her own initiative, limped to the infirmary. It was upon the result of this consultation that she ever became fluent in speech, for the doctor had told her that a small bone in her heel was out of its place. Now Onion Alice had all her life considered that her heel was composed of "a piece of hard flesh," hence her astonishment. She considered it all of a piece with this extraordinary knowledge on the part of the doctor, that on that very evening she should have had a pig's foot for supper and discovered in it beyond a doubt the certainty of small bones. After this her faith in doctors was unshakable.

Now Onion Alice lodged with Granny Kinsey, and save for the ugly appendage of a drunken husband, Granny Kinsey had no fault to find with her. Indeed, as a lodger she

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suited her landlady very well, because of her queer ways and vagabond life, which made her a better-informed companion than most country women, and her unvarying and unmovable disposition, which acted as a sedative upon that of Granny Kinsey, whose temper was warm and hasty.

One evening, as Granny Kinsey was bringing up her cow from the pasture, she saw Onion Alice on the road in front of her, and walking so slowly that even at a cow's pace she soon overtook her. She then saw that Onion Alice was clasping with both arms a slab of stone, which she had the greatest difficulty in carrying. In fact, as Granny Kinsey came up to her, she let the slab down upon the bank and sat down beside it. Granny Kinsey looked at her with astonishment.

"You've got enough to carry anyway," she said.

"Enough and to spare," said Onion Alice, sitting still and letting Granny Kinsey go on in front with her cow.

Presently, after Granny Kinsey had driven her cow home, and milked it, and was coming

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across the yard with her pail of milk, she saw Onion Alice go into the orchard dragging her slab of stone by her leather belt, which she had taken off and fastened round it. She propped it up against the tree of Good Templars, stood back a little way to look at it, and then turned to come into the house. Granny Kinsey's liveliest curiosity was aroused. She went to meet her lodger in the orchard, and going up to the tree of Good Templars examined the stone. It was a piece of sandstone roughly chiselled to a circular shape at the top.

"It looks like a tombstone, only it's too little," said Granny Kinsey aloud.

"It looks what it is, then," replied Onion Alice, who had returned to see what Granny Kinsey would say, and who stood tranquilly regarding the piece of brown stone.

Granny Kinsey stared at her.

"Who for?" she asked.

"Me," replied Onion Alice, and finding that Granny Kinsey only looked more astonished and did not reply she continued, still regarding the slab of rough stone with complacency: "It's an idea I've had in my head for a long

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time. It come into my mind a long while ago when I was living with my good husband and I fell downstairs. I didn't go bump, bump on the steps as you might expect, but I fell flat from top to bottom and I shouts out, 'Oh, William, I'm kilt,' and there and then while I was laying at the bottom of the stairs it came into my head that if I was William wouldn't put up a tombstone."

"If I had my way," exclaimed Granny Kinsey, her temper rising at the mention of the deserter, "I'd put that William of yours in the workhouse by law and keep him there."

"Well, you see," said Onion Alice, mildly forbearing, "he must live. Everybody must live. Even if they've been in prison they've the right to live, and I daresay if matters was only looked into, lives is just as sweet to them that drinks as to them that doesn't."

"I wouldn't have married such a man," said Granny Kinsey, "not if he'd had a gold sovereign hanging to every hair of his head."

"Well, you see, the chance is a fine thing," said Onion Alice; "but as I was saying about the tombstone, I don't know that death's

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in the cup yet, but I got ready betimes. I've always thought when it came to buryin' that I shouldn't like to be buried in the Isle of Man. I've always been sorry for the people that's buried there I must say, out in the middle of the sea."

"You're right there," said Granny Kinsey, "home's home even in the grave. But what are you going to do with your tombstone now you've got it?"

"I'm going to put my name on it," replied Onion Alice.

"Onion Alice?" asked Granny Kinsey doubtfully.

"Arabella Lidge," replied Onion Alice. "It's my christened name, don't you see. Onion Alice does very well for a working name, but it doesn't look so well when you come to die."

"Well," said Granny Kinsey, turning away at last, "living and learning, as the saying is; but if you'll just get these few words into your head, 'A long stocking and a short cough,' you'll not see the grave for many a year, Alice. I'll have nothing to say to such work as this.

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You must go your own way and please yourself about it."

"Yes, I will," returned Onion Alice placidly."

Granny Kinsey had more than half a mind to take away the uncanny thing some day when Onion Alice had gone on her rounds, but being a busy person, the days slipped past until she became first accustomed to its presence and then actually interested in the clumsy letters which Onion Alice cut so laboriously upon it. As for Onion Alice, the tombstone quickly became the largest feature of her life. When she came home tired she would say, "I'll just go out and rest me and do a little chipping." She became as attached to this piece of stone with its uneven letters as to a living thing.

One day as Onion Alice was in the town on her way to the great market to buy her onions she fainted. The crowd who were buying and selling live-stock around her on the edge of the market divided to give her air, but finding that she remained unconscious, two policemen carried her into the infirmary. When there she learnt that she was ill of a fatal and swift

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disease, and that but a short time remained of her life. There would be no very apparent failure until the end, but the end was already in sight. When she had rested and received some medicine she made her way home. Granny Kinsey was out when she arrived, and whether it was because of her new knowledge or not, Onion Alice felt very ill. She drank her medicine, and on finding that it was very nasty, was quite satisfied of its efficacy. She drank two doses at once to give it a better chance, and then sat down to await Granny Kinsey. But now, since this tale is really Granny Kinsey's and not mine, I will put it into her mouth from this point.

“I came home,” related Granny Kinsey, “and walked, right through the room, never thinking that anyone was there, because I never expected Onion Alice till night, and I went upstairs and came down again, and it wasn't till I was at the bottom of the stairs that I got such a turn as I never had in all my life. For there inside the room was Onion Alice, with a bottle in one hand and a cup in the other, and as white as a sheet. I don't know how

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ever it came into my head, but I thought that she was taking poison, and I ran and took the bottle away from her, and she looked up at me and said, 'Whatever are you doing now, granny?' 'Well,' I said, 'I'm keeping you from doing harm to yourself.' 'The doctor gave it me, and he says I'm marked for death,' she said. 'How long have you been sitting here?' I said; 'was you here when I come in?' 'Yes,' she said; 'you went right through without looking at me.' I didn't know what to make of her, so I looked at the bottle of medicine that I'd thought was poison. 'You got this from the infirmary,' I says. 'I suppose so,' she said; 'I was in the market, as I thought, but it turned out to be the infirmary, and they gave me that bottle and told me I was marked for death in a few weeks, and I was to go home.'

"'Nay, Alice love,' I said. 'You mustn't sit there if you're feeling poorly. Come, and I'll help you to get to bed. You'll be all right in a day or two.'

"'I'll not go to bed,' she said, and she got up and walked across the room, but she knocked

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against one thing and another, till I took hold of her and made her sit down, and then she laughed at me and said—

“‘There doesn’t seem to be room enough for me in this kitchen ; I’m getting too big for my position.’

“So I laughed too, to please her, and got her to sit down while I made a cup of tea, and while I was setting it on the hob to draw the nature out of it, I watched her without her seeing me. I could see she had something on her mind, but I just took no notice, and when I set the teapot on the table, it came out what she’d been thinking of.

• “‘I think I’ve got enough money to see me through,’ Granny Kinsey,’ she says. I was *that* hurt ! .

“‘Onion Alice,’ I says, very solemn, ‘if you think you can get a better nurse than me in the Union you’re welcome to try, but I think you’ll find yourself mistaken ; and as for money,’ I says, nearly crying, ‘I ask you to put it to your own heart—could I take money off a dying woman ? I shall have to die myself some day,’ I says.

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“‘I suppose so,’ she says, and then she drank her tea and thought a bit more.

“‘I think I’ll go to bed, granny,’ she says, and I was glad to hear her say so, because there’s no doing with a sick person if they take it into their head to be up and about. .

“She stopped in bed for three days. Every morning she used to ask me when I went in what sort of a day it was outside, and whether the leaves was falling yet, and at night she’d tell me to look out and see if there was a moon.

“‘The moon’s such good company,’ she said.

“On the fourth day I went in as usual, and I found her sitting up in bed waiting for me.

“‘Granny,’ she says, ‘I’ve come to die, and I thought I’d just like to say a few last words. Sit you down in that chair by the bedside. Perhaps in a few days I shall be no more, and there’s one or two little matters I’d like to talk over while I’ve got my senses. And first of all, Granny Kinsey, as you’re a living woman and I’m a dying one, will you see that

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stone in the garden put above me when I'm gone?'

• “‘Yes,’ I says, ‘I’ll see it done if you go first, but you’ll outlive me yet by many a year,’ I says.

“‘I should by rights,’ she says, ‘but not as it happens. However, you’ll do that. Now if William should happen to call when I’m gone, there’s no occasion for you to be short with him, because, when all’s said and done, it’ll be a day of sorrow for him when I’m no more. He’ll come and he’ll very likely say, “Is Alice in?” he’ll say, and you’ll not speak a word but this: “I was told to fetch you to her if you come.” And you’ll take him to where I’m lying in the churchyard, and point out the spot and say, “William Lidge! Onion Alice, lying below, says she forgives and forgets you!” I left a place where he could cut his name if he felt inclined, but that’s neither here nor there. All you’ve got to say is, “William Lidge! Onion Alice, lying below, says she forgives and forgets you,” and then you comes away and leaves him dumbfounded. I’ve no doubt when I’m gone that woman at the “Three

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Crowns " 'll marry him. Well, I don't care if she does, so long as she keeps him clean. He's not much good.

" "There's only two people belonging to me that I knows of. My father and mother's been dead and gone for years. I've got a sister somewhere in Birmingham, but I've not been nigh her, nor she me, for many a year. Then I've a brother a policeman. He used to come and see me and lock up my good husband sometimes. I've not seen him since William went off. I've always thought them two's best left alone. I never made much out of them. I've always kept myself to myself. The kindness I've had showed to me has been from strangers like yourself, Granrny Kinsey, and I will say this—you've been like a mother to me for kindness, and I'm much obliged to you. I'd think it well done of you if you asked one or two neighbours to the funeral. There's no occasion to have much. I should like a bit of ham, and I noticed there was a deal of watercress as you come over Ashton Moss. You might have ham and watercress and any other little thing you thought of, not to go to

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much expense. Drinking's best left alone. I don't think there's any more to say. I took it a bit hard that I should be marked to die so young, as you might say, but dying's like everything else, it wants getting accustomed to. I daresay my room's better than my company.'

"I couldn't hold in any longer with that kind of talk. 'Nay, Alice,' I says, 'if you die, you mustn't die like that. I'll say a prayer before you go.'

"'Yes, do,' she says, 'if it'll ease your mind.'

"So I knelt down and said 'Our Father,' and when I got up she says—

"'I don't think I've got any more to say. I've told you all that I want, so there's no occasion to speak again. You'll know when the end comes without me telling you. I'll bid you good-bye, and thank you for all your kindness, Granny Kinsey. I shan't speak again in this world.'

"And she lay down as quiet as could be. I couldn't get her to answer me when I spoke to her, so I left off speaking. She went about

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the middle of the next night when the moon was shining at full, and I did everything as she'd told me. I did miss her when she'd gone," said Granny Kinsey.

THE END

